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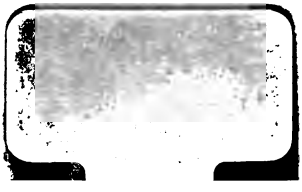

SERMONS,

ON

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY THE LATE

REV. SAMUEL CARR, D.D.

PREBENDARY OF ST. PAUL'S;
RECTOR OF ST. ANDREW UNDERSHAFT, LONDON;
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MATT. xiii. 31, 32.

The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches of it.

THIS elegant similitude, addressed by our Saviour to the multitudes who followed him to the sea of Tiberias, contains a most lively description of the first rise, and amazing subsequent progress of the Gospel, which is here called the kingdom of heaven. Planted in an unfriendly soil by an obscure Galilean, and cultivated under every possible disadvantage by the hands of a few illiterate fishermen and mechanics, it might well seem to resemble the smallest and most unpromising of all seeds: but notwithstanding

standing this unfavourable appearance, supported by its own natural strength, and refreshed by the dews from heaven, it soon sprang up into a great and flourishing tree; so that the fowls of the air, that is, the various nations of the world, were able to find shelter and protection under its wide and umbrageous branches.

And if we examine the state of the Gospel in its several successive stages, we shall find that it will abundantly justify the description here given.

Let us begin with the infant state of this great scheme of a new system of religious truths, and see what was its first introduction into the world. And here what a melancholy and unpromising scene presents itself to our view! One might have expected, that a plan formed by the hand of God himself, should have opened with some signal display of his divine power; should have contained something in its first appearance suited to the majesty of its divine Author, and which might strike resistless conviction into the hearts of those to whom it was proposed. But, instead of this, an obscure Jew, whose name was John, commissioned indeed by God himself, but whose commission was known only to his own family and neighbours, takes upon himself the

the office of a divine herald, and proclaims to his countrymen the approach of that Messiah, who had been so long promised to their fathers. And what opinion were a blind and superstitious people likely to entertain of such a harbinger as this! His life indeed was holy, and his manners were strict and exemplary: but his appearance was mean, and unaccompanied with any display of divine power and greatness. He proclaimed indeed to them the coming of that Messiah, whom they had so long and impatiently waited for to deliver them from the burden of the Roman yoke, under which they groaned: but then the Deliverer he pointed out to them was a person of obscure parentage, and unattended with any marks of regal greatness or divine authority; and what was worst of all, he also told them, that they could not even partake of the blessings which he came to offer, without the hard task of relinquishing their sins, and bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. So that though we find all Jerusalem and all Judæa confessing their sins to this divine messenger, and submitting to the initiatory rite of baptism, yet there is but too much reason to believe that they did this rather out of curiosity and novelty, than with any sincere design of abandoning their sins, or through a firm persuasion that he was indeed the messenger of the Son of God:

for, as a learned writer has well observed, "at "the most this baptism only amounted to a de- "claration of the belief of the near approach of "the Messias; but certainly not that Jesus was "that Messias *." And if they had, even at that time, their doubts, how must these doubts have been heightened and increased, when they saw this very messenger, in a very short time, first ignominiously cast into prison, and afterwards barbarously murdered by a capricious tyrant, without any mark of divine interposition in his favour.

Thus far the tidings of the Gospel seem to have little to recommend themselves to the acceptance and approbation of those to whom they were offered. Let us see then, whether He who was to come after him, even the Son of God himself, appeared to the world under more advantageous circumstances, or was likely to meet with a more favourable reception than his short-lived antecessor.

I need not here remark that the first thirty years of our Saviour's life were spent in privacy and retirement; in the practice, we may imagine, of all those heavenly virtues, which he

* Vid. Burnet on Art. XXVII.

came to teach mankind. But what his particular employment was, we cannot pretend to say, unless we were weak and credulous enough to give heed to fables, not even "cunningly "devised." From that time he intirely devoted himself to the accomplishment of the great work for which he came into the world. By every argument and method of persuasion he incessantly laboured to convince the Jews of the reality of his divine commission, and to induce them to embrace the easy terms of salvation which were offered to them. By a life of the most unsullied purity and universal benevolence, by an address the most engaging and inoffensive, by a series of miracles the most astonishing and incontestible, he did indeed, beyond the power of contradiction, demonstrate to every reasonable man, that he was the very Christ.

But yet, to say nothing of the unreasonable prejudices of those to whom he addressed himself, which alone were sufficient to obstruct the progress of his doctrine, we are at the same time to consider, that the ministry of our Saviour was confined to the Jews only, and that his religion could not otherwise be known even to many of them, than by uncertain report or precarious tradition. And, what was the most unfavourable circumstance of all, in appearance, to the

promulgation of his doctrines, scarcely had he taught them for little more than the short space of three years, before he was dragged before a human tribunal, arraigned, condemned and executed as a vile and dangerous malefactor.

This then might justly seem a fatal blow to the cause of Christianity, and more than sufficient to have put a stop to its farther progress in the world. For if the Jews, to whom the Gospel was first addressed, were shocked to behold him, whom they looked for as an earthly king, arrayed in splendor and surrounded with power, born among the lowest of the people, friendless, poor, and undignified; how much more must they have been shocked to see him, whom they looked for as a deliverer, a Saviour, a God, as a criminal arraigned, condemned, and disgracefully dying upon the cross? These were appearances hard to be reconciled to their prejudiced expectations; these were events hard to be explained; little likely to conquer the hearts of an obstinate people; little adapted to gain converts to the cause of Christianity. And indeed nothing could be more hopeless and unpromising than its present appearance, in every other respect. Deprived of the presence and support of its divine Author; opposed by the rooted prejudices of Jewish bigotry; in contradiction

diction to the lucrative superstitions of gentile idolatry; at enmity with the vices and corruptions of the world; traduced by the bitterest misrepresentations of calumny; prohibited by the power of the civil sword; devoid of every temporal advantage that could allure, and surrounded with every misery that could terrify and discourage; what human sagacity could think of its breaking through all these black clouds of obstruction, and of its becoming "a "light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory "of the people Israel?"

Yet had it, even under these discouraging circumstances, been supported by men of distinguished rank and eminence, by men of superior abilities and genius, by men of singular address and long practised in the arts and subtilties of the world, the contest might not have seemed so very unequal, the success not so totally out of the reach of time and perseverance. But this was very far from being the case. The guardians to whom this infant orphan was committed, were a few indigent, unlettered fishermen and mechanics, unconnected with the wealthy or the powerful, unskilled in the arts of persuasion, unpractised in the subtilties of philosophical disquisition and the distinctions of logical argumentation. Nay, what was more, they had

been frequently reproached by their divine Master himself for want of apprehension, for the grossness of their conceptions, for their deficiency in faith and courage; and they had given indubitable proof of all these by their obstinate perseverance in looking upon him as a temporal prince and deliverer, by their cowardice in deserting him when he was apprehended, by their weak lamentation arising from the disappointment of their hopes at his death, and by their incredulity when he appeared to them after his resurrection. What therefore could seem more hopeless? What attempt more desperate and forbidding? What causes more inadequate to the effect to be produced; were we to judge by the rules of human prudence and foresight?

To put this in a still stronger light; let us only take a view of the astonishing attempt of St. Paul to spread the doctrines of Christianity through the city of Rome, and we cannot find a more extraordinary instance of the difficulties the Gospel had to encounter, and the seemingly disproportionate means by which it was promulged.

It will be unnecessary perhaps to observe, that the grandeur and power of Rome was at this time arrived at its full stature and perfection.

tion. Raised upon the ruins of the three mighty empires of Assyria, Persia, and Greece, it proudly towered above the rest of the world, and had attained to a height of greatness unknown to former ages: a height, not only of wealth and large extent of power, but also of learning, of morality, of refinement, of policy, of arts and arms.

But this was not all. The Romans were not only thus great in power, but, which was a worse obstacle to Christianity, they were great in superstition also: they were the most zealous asserters of all the mysteries and corruptions of Ethnic idolatry of any people in the world. They had many thousand gods within the compass of their city, as Varro tells us, in commendation of their piety and devotion. In short, they received every thing pretending to divine honour, and excluded no person but Christ himself; and him for this only reason, at least as Eusebius tells us, because he had been acknowledged as a God in Judæa without the consent of the senate *.

What then could be more astonishing than the attempt of St. Paul to convert this powerful

* Vide Van Dale de Oraculis, Diss. I. p. 46.

and

aud idolatrous people? Here is a little single apostle engaged against the greatest empire of the world. Here is a stranger of mean quality and appearance, a poor despised Jew, attempting no less than to disarm, and pull down, and banish, all the gods of imperial Rome, and in spite of all the power, and wit, and learning, and prejudices of their adorers, to cast them to the moles and to the bats, and to introduce a new and unheard-of religion; a religion spiritual and refined; a way of worship estranged from all the gross and specious rites of idolatry, rivetted in their minds by early prejudice, and become sacred by long and established usage, from the reign of Numa to that of Tiberias, being 700 years.

But these were not the only difficulties which accompanied this arduous undertaking. St. Paul had not only to encounter all these corruptions, but, what was still worse, the patrons and defenders of them. He had to combat the proud philosophers and dogmatists of the age, men exceedingly learned and popular, and admired as gods in human shape: so that whosoever should venture to contradict these favourites of the people, must needs labour under great disadvantages, and be sure of being laughed at or silenced, without a fair and equitable

equitable hearing; as we know, in fact, it happened to St. Stephen at Jerusalem, and to St. Paul at Athens.

And besides these, there were other enemies of Christianity, armed with sharper weapons against the propagators of it. These were the patrons of the old idolatry, who enforced their opinions by the severest penalties of legal vindiction; who expressly commanded, that every man should conform to the religion of his country, and that no one should, unauthorized, adore a new god or reject an old one, on pain of death or banishment. "Honestiores depor-"tentur, humiliores capite puniantur." Accordingly we find, that its * novelty alone was always one weighty objection against Christianity: the Athenians stiled it, "καινη διδαχη;" and it is called by Suetonius, "novæ superstitionis genus."

But the opposition of these men against the religion of Jesus was not only on account of its novelty, but also of its inconsistency with other ways of worship. And hence it was that the appointed inspectors of worship condemned the Christians as guilty of contumely, for refusing

* Vide Bingham's Orig. Eccles. Vol. I. p. 17.

to

to adore any gods but their own, and endeavouring to abolish the worship of all other gods.

How daring therefore was it, according to human estimation, in a single, unsupported stranger, to face all these combined powers of prejudices and penalties, to assert the unity of the true God, to declare against their plurality and distinctions of deities, to deride their canonized heroes and venerated dæmons, to oppose the pride and supercilious vanity of their learned philosophers, to detect their manifold errors and absurdities; in short, to subvert the whole plan of their religious faith and worship, delivered down to them from the venerable code of Numa to the reign of Tiberias, and explained and supported by the combined wit and eloquence of Greece and Rome! Yet, notwithstanding all these disadvantages and discouragements, he gloriously triumphed over all opposition, and silenced the mouth of gainsayers. "A little "one," said God by his prophet Isaiah, "shall "become a thousand, and a small one a strong "nation: I the Lord will hasten it in due "time." And this was the due time for the accomplishment of this remarkable prediction; for under this little one, for so the name of Paul implies, so mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed, that he soon could boast of his proselytes

lytes even in Cæsar's houshold, and his bonds in Christ were manifest throughout all the palace, and in all other parts of Rome.

Nor did the christian doctrine meet with less opposition in other parts of the world; from the power of civil magistrates and rulers, from the sagacity of the Athenian philosophers, from the subtilty of the Scribes and Pharisees at Jerusalem, and from the prevalence of vice, error, interest, and prejudice every where: and yet with equal success surmounted all impediments, and in a very short space spread itself into all places, and was embraced by almost incredible multitudes; insomuch that it was the boast of the primitive Christians, as Tertullian tells us, that they were but of yesterday, and yet filled the court, the senate-house, and every other place of public resort.

And now then, to sum up the whole of the argument, when we see this doctrine so reproached for its novelty and its opposition to all the learning and religions in credit and force among men: a doctrine so despised for the obscure parentage, mean condition of life and ignominious death of its Author; a doctrine traduced and made infamous to the common people by the blackest slanders that wit and malice

malice could charge upon it and its professors: a doctrine utterly averse to all the blind superstitions, erroneous customs, corrupt passions, inveterate habits and dispositions of the pagan world and the natural heart of man: a doctrine, condemned for folly and madness by men of the highest reputation for wisdom; to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness; crushed and pursued in all places by the cunning of the statist and the sword of the magistrate; cried down by all the arts of rhetoric and subornation; discouraged and depressed by all the cruelties and contrivances of men and devils: and on the other hand disseminated and supported only by a few illiterate and obscure men, of low parentage and education, of no eloquence or address, of no repute or authority, "despised," as a learned * writer expresses it, "as Jews by the rest of mankind, and as the "meanest and worst of Jews by the Jews themselves;" when we see it, notwithstanding all these disadvantages, prevail in the world, fly like the winged lightning from east to west, confound the polite Grecian, and instruct the Scythian and rude Arab in the sublime mysteries of heaven, pull down the strong holds of idolatry, take captive the civil power, and transform

* Atterbury.

the

the inveterate superstitions of heathenism and the rivetted corruptions of Judaism into the charity, meekness and benevolence of christian purity: shall we cry out in the bold language of a Gibbon or Voltaire, that this arises from the fortuitous agency and co-operation of human causes; or shall we not rather say, that this is the effect of the finger of God, in a wonderful manner stretched out for its protection and support, and by a powerful agency over-ruling all things to the full accomplishment of its gracious purposes of redeeming and enlightening mankind?

2dly, If this extraordinary success and propagation of the Gospel clearly demonstrates a divine interposition in the first planting of Christianity; it also gives us no less assurance of its continuance to the end of the world, in spite of all opposition and resistance; for this is the counsel of God that shall stand, and the pleasure of Him that hath spoken, and shall bring it to pass. For as it was prophesied, that Mount Sion should be exalted above the hills, and that many nations should flow into it; that Christ should be made higher than the kings of the earth; that princes should come out of Egypt, and the Morian's land stretch out her hands unto God; that the heathen should become his inheritance,

heritance, and the utmost parts of the earth his possession; that from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same his name should be great among the Gentiles: so also it was declared by the same prophetic spirit, that his kingdom should endure for ever, and of his government there should be no end.

Vainly, therefore, will the infidel dart his poisoned arrows, and the scoffer level his profane wit; in vain will all the powers of darkness unite their efforts against our holy religion: it is founded on a rock, which no time or chance can shake: its permanency and stability are irrefragably confirmed to us by the sure word of prophecy; to which, therefore, we shall do well to take heed, in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation; and to be well assured, that He, who hath begun this good work, will also continue it, even unto the end.

Lastly, The more firmly we are convinced of the operation of a divine power in planting and propagating the Gospel, the more it becomes us to reverence its precepts and practise its duties; for the more signal has been the display of God's power and mercy in making known to us the glad tidings of salvation, the heavier will be our crime, if we shut our ears against them. Let

us

us not, therefore, think it a matter of indifference, whether we are Christians or not: we must either be Christians, or we must be miserable. For as the Apostle justly argues, "If the word "spoken by angels was stedfast, and every "transgression and disobedience received a just "recompense of reward, how shall we escape, if "we neglect so great salvation; which at the "first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was "confirmed to us by them that heard him; "God also bearing them witness both with "signs, and wonders, and divers miracles and "gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his "own will? Therefore we ought to give the "more earnest heed to the things which we "have heard, lest at any time we should let "them slip."

SERMON XLV.

PSALM lxxiv. 16, 17.

The day is thine, and the night is thine; thou hast prepared the light and the sun.—Thou hast set all the borders of the earth; thou hast made summer and winter.

WHOEVER attentively considers the shortness and uncertainty of human life, will want no arguments to persuade him to a frequent review of his past actions and the state of his eternal interests. Amidst the toils and tumult of the world, he will stand still for a moment; he will set its giddy pursuits and pleasures at a distance; and, anticipating that awful moment when death shall knock at the door, will ask himself in an hour of seriousness and retirement,—Am I prepared for such a visit? Have I so settled the great business, for which I came into the world, that I can calmly meet the

great Judge of quick and dead, and give up my accounts with joy?

These are thoughts at all times interesting and important, and therefore never will be far from the breast of a wise man.

But they will more especially present themselves to our minds whenever we look upon our past lives, and revolve the various changing scenes and seasons we have gone through in our passage through the world. At such a time we cannot forbear reflecting, that every change of season brings us one step nearer to the gate of eternity; that thousands of those, who but a few months ago were our fellow-travellers or companions through life, are now mouldering in the silent grave; that it is through the mercy of God that we have been thus far preserved from the decays of age and the fatality of disease; but that even our period cannot be very distant; —a few days, or months, or years, will mingle us also with the ashes of our forefathers, and sign our eternal doom.

Such reflections as these will naturally lead us to praise God, the giver of all good things, for his past mercies; and at the same time to inquire seriously what use we have made of them; whether

whether we have so numbered our days as to apply our hearts unto wisdom; whether our length of days has added to our virtue and happiness, or has increased the number of our sins and follies. And where this inquiry is made with earnestness and sincerity, whilst it disposes us to implore the continuance of his protection, who ruleth over all, it will also inspire us with resolutions of amendment for the time to come; that with the increase of our days we may also increase in the knowlege and fear of God, and in all those spiritual graces which adorn the Christian life.

To assist you, therefore, in such holy meditations; and in obedience to that duty which calls upon me to endeavour to raise your minds from earth to heaven; from the visible creature, to God the invisible Creator; I have made choice of the words of the Psalmist, in which he praises God for his goodness in fixing all the bounds of the earth, and appointing the revolving times and seasons for the benefit and convenience of man:—"The day is thine, and the "night is thine; thou hast prepared the light "and the sun.—Thou hast set all the borders "of the earth; thou hast made summer and "winter."

"The day is thine, and the night is thine." Some indeed have fancied them the work of chance, or the necessary effect of second causes, and co-eval with God himself: but the sweet singer of Israel, who better knew the footsteps of divine Providence, attributes them to God as their proper author:—"The day," says he, "is thine, and the night also is thine;" that is, they are both his peculiar work, which he first formed by his divine power, and which he has since maintained in the same wise order from the beginning of the world. And, therefore, in another place, he mentions the day and night among those things which more eminently declare the glory of their Creator: "The hea-"vens," says he, "declare the glory of God, "and the firmament sheweth his handy-work; "day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto "night uttereth knowledge."

And well may we join with the Psalmist in ascribing the vicissitude of day and night to the hand of an all-powerful and intelligent cause, which is God, rather than to blind chance or unintelligent destiny: for in these there is neither order, nor succession, nor constancy; but nothing can be more constant and regular than the succession of day and night; and that not in one country or climate only, but in all the

the regions of the habitable world, and through all the past ages of revolving time, "ever since "the morning stars sang together, and the sons "of God shouted for joy," at the creation of all things. Since, therefore, their course is regulated by such an uniform and wonderful order, we must conclude, that it cannot be the work of chance, but is the result of his wisdom, who "formed all things in number, weight, and "measure."

And indeed had they not been preserved, as well as at first formed, by infinite wisdom, it is impossible but that some confusion must have happened in the revolution of so many ages; since we know that the matter out of which all things are formed, could neither preserve and regulate its own motions, nor ward off that decay to which all generated beings are ever subject by the established laws of nature.

To God, therefore, the Creator of all things, let us ascribe the glory of this wonderful work, and acknowledge with the Psalmist in my text, "The day is thine, the night also is thine;" thou hast made them both, and directed their course for the advantage of the lower world, for the benefit and pleasure of mankind.

And to both these they are in a wonderful manner adapted: for when our eyes have been long closed in the shades of darkness, it is impossible not to feel pleasure as well as advantage from the cheerful light of the dawning day. It awakes the speculative to the contemplation of the works of Providence, and rouses the industrious to their daily task of labour:—it calls forth the powers of vegetation for the use of man, and inspires the several ranks of the animal world with strength and vigour for his service:—it dispels the gloom of solitude and darkness, and opens the way for the necessary intercourse of man with man:—it guides the skill of the mechanic, and directs the toil of the peasant; without which the world would become a second chaos, and society perish under the agonies of distress and the unsatisfied cravings of want.

And as for the night, though to undiscerning eyes it may seem less advantageous than the day, yet it has also its necessary uses to the world;—it is the wonderful work of God, who is no less to be praised for the night than the day. Accordingly, the author of that excellent hymn in our Church Liturgy calls upon both to extol the wisdom of their great Creator: "O ye nights "and days, bless ye the Lord, praise him and "magnify him for ever: O ye lights and dark-

"ness,

" ness, bless ye the Lord, praise and magnify " him for ever." And indeed great reason have we to bless God for the regular return of night. To the philosophic eye it gives the glorious opportunity of investigating the course of the stars and moon, even all that host of heaven which God hath ordained. It recruits the stores of the earth by its refreshing dews;—it affords a necessary interval to all creatures from the toils of the day;—it sooths the pang of sorrow, and alleviates the burden of care;—it softens the pains of sickness, and steeps in oblivion the torments of the wounded heart; and, what is of all the most important, it recalls us from the sins and tumult of the day, to God and ourselves; in the beautiful words of one of our own poets,

" Darkness the curtain drops o'er life's dull scene:
" 'Tis the kind hand of Providence stretch'd out
" 'Twixt man and vanity: 'tis reason's reign,
" And virtue's too."

YOUNG, Night V.

It affords a solemn pause to the giddy and unthinking;—it gives us time and opportunity to reflect what we have been doing, and what we ought to have done;—it recalls to our minds by sleep the just image of death, that awful moment, when we shall sleep to wake no more;—it reminds us of the necessity of always committing

mitting ourselves to his guardian care, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, when we consider how helpless and defenceless we are ourselves in the hours of silence and the darkness of the night.

Well may we, therefore, ascribe the wisdom and order of these things to God, the wise Author of all things.—"The day is thine, the night "also is thine," thou all-merciful Parent of nature.—"Thou hast also prepared the light and "the sun:" from thee he derives his glorious beams, which disperse light and life through the universe. It was thy almighty arm which first hung his all-streaming lamp in the firmament of heaven to rule the day: it was thy almighty arm that directed the moon in her course to rule the night: Thou madest the stars also. To thee, therefore, be ascribed the glory of these great and wonderful works, by whose power alone they are and were created!

The second work of God mentioned in the text, is the distribution of the earth into its several bounds and portions:—"Thou hast set all "the borders of the earth."

By which we are to understand all the bounds of the earth in general, of what nature soever they

they are; all of which are set and determined by the peculiar providence and designation of God. The earth itself is a solid body, suspended in the middle of the fluid air, and revolving in its appointed orb, without any other support than that wonderful law of centripetal attraction which it first received from the hand of Omnipotence. The sea is a fluid mass of water whose bounds are so fixed by the same almighty hand, that though it rage it cannot prevail against them, neither turn again to cover the earth: for such is the power of the great Lawgiver of nature, that even the earth and air, the winds and seas, with all their boisterous powers, obey him:—as he spake, and they were made, so he hath made them fast for ever and ever; he hath given them a law which shall not be broken.

But besides this general disposition, which regulates the motions and position of the earth, with its several parts and appendages, it is also divided into several distinct regions, each of which have their proper boundaries.—And it is God alone who has assigned all these bounds to the earth, and given to every country its proper limits. And though men, fired by ambition, or avarice, or revenge, overleap these mighty fences of Providence, and carry war and desolation

tion into the remotest lands; yet let it be remembered it is through his permission, and to execute his just judgments upon guilty and impenitent nations. So that we may justly say with the Psalmist, "O Lord, our governor, how ex-"cellent is thy name in all the world, thou that "hast set thy glory above the heavens." Let all the nations of the earth worship thee and praise thy power; for thou hast ordained to each their proper bounds; "thou hast set all the bor-"ders of the earth."

The third work which the Psalmist ascribes to God in the text, is the alternate succession of the seasons:—"Thou hast made summer "and winter." A work of Providence no less deserving of admiration than any of the former! for as the summer is necessary for the production of those various stores which are the support of man and beast; so is the winter no less necessary to temper and moderate the air, to mellow and fertilize the earth, and prepare the various tribes of vegetables to send forth their useful treasures for the benefit of man. And though it is not, like the summer, adorned with fruits and flowers; though it is not equally gilded with the cheerful and invigorating beams of the sun, but may be called in some sort the decline, or temporary death of nature; yet health

health is in its train, and social converse enlivens its gloomy hours; it communicates strength to the body and vigour to the mind, which would be too much relaxed and enervated by a constant and unremitting warmth. So justly has the Almighty in the regulation of the seasons tempered pleasure with profit; and whilst he has by their various uses supplied us with all things necessary for life, has at the same time by their successive revolutions delighted us with a pleasing variety and the charms of novelty.

When, therefore, we consider these various works of Providence, let us raise our thoughts to the almighty Author, and shew forth his works with praise. When we consider the benefits he bestows upon us, let us adore that goodness which provides for all his creatures, and chiefly for man, the lord of all. When we consider the beauty and order that shine through all the parts of the universe, let us admire his wisdom. When we are struck with the greatness and magnificence of them, let us reverence his almighty power; and in all our thoughts, words, and works, love and honour so great, so good, and so merciful a God, and cry out with the Prophet, "There is none like unto thee, O "Lord; there is none that can do as thou doest:

"thou

" thou art great and good, and doest wondrous " things; thou art God alone."

More especially whenever we look back upon the years we have past, let us remember that the several seasons of them were the workmanship of God, and that every day and night of them was ordained by his wisdom. This, whilst it disposes us, on the one hand, to " tell of his loving " kindness early in the morning, and of his " truth in the night season," should at the same time lead us to consider what use we have made of them; deploring our past negligence, and resolving to redeem the time to come by a wise application of every hour. When the day appears, we should reflect that it is an additional gift of God's goodness, and therefore should be usefully employed; that the light calls all creatures to their several employs, and therefore should not be spent by us in idleness and vanity. And when the night comes to cover us with darkness, we should remember that it also comes from God, and is under the guidance of his divine Providence; that it cannot hide us from his all-seeing eye, nor cover our sins from his knowledge; for the darkness is no darkness to him, but the night is as clear as day. Let us not, therefore, employ the solemn hours of silence

silence and repose in doing such things as may too well be called the works of darkness; "but "let us walk honestly as in the day; not in "rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering "and wantonness, not in strife and envying; "but let us put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and "make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the "lusts thereof."

And, as the revolving seasons fly over our heads, let them remind us of the swift lapse of time, and therefore of the necessity of diligence in our several callings; and especially in that great work for which we were sent into the world, and on which the fate of eternity depends. A few more changing months or years, and then all our days will be gone: time will be no more: "Whatever, therefore, our hand "findeth to do, let us do it with all our might; "for there is neither work, nor device, nor "knowledge in the grave, whither we are "going."

Lastly, let us consider the different periods and seasons of the year as emblems of the changes and chances of this mortal life. If the summer of prosperity smiles upon us, let us not be vainly puffed up, but remember that every life will have also its succeeding winter of affliction.

fliction. And if the wintry storms of adversity press hard upon us; if affliction rain her bitter drops upon our unsheltered heads; if the hand of death tear from us friends, parents, children, and every dear and tender connection in life; yet let us stand firm in Christ, and patiently wait for that resurrection from the dead, which will quicken our hopes, dry up our tears, and revive our dejected minds. If the dark night of sorrow overtake us, let it be our comfort that it cannot last long. The day-spring from on high will soon visit us, and the light of a better life cheer our hearts. And though we now wander in darkness, and amidst shadows, doubts, and uncertainties, we shall then be set free from that vanity to which all things below are subject: we shall then enjoy such a day as will be succeeded by no night; such a summer as will never end. Jesus, the brightness of the everlasting Father, will be our glorious sun; heaven and immortality will be our portion; and we shall join with angels and archangels in celebrating the praises of that God who appointeth the day and the night, who setteth all the borders of the earth, who maketh summer and winter.

SERMON XLVI.

AMOS iv. 12.

Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.

TO stand before a just and avenging God; to have all our secret sins and midnight follies, all our dark designs and treacherous machinations, all our frauds, perjuries, and oppressions laid open to men and angels; to have our nearest friends and dearest relatives in awful silence waiting to hear the dreadful sentence of eternal condemnation pronounced against us, is surely an idea the most solemn and tremendous that human imagination can conceive; and yet how little regarded by the generality of mankind! We live in thoughtless ease and listless affluence: we securely crop the rose-buds of the spring, the pleasures and vanities of the present moment, as if we had never heard of a future period of existence, or the earth we tread upon

were destined for our everlasting habitation. We suffer the generations of men to glide away unnoticed; we see our benefactors, our friends, our enemies, successively drop into the silent grave; we behave as if the scene was there for ever closed; not considering, that we ourselves are suspended over the abyss of eternity by the slender thread of life, and that we shall soon appear together as joyful candidates for immortal glory, or trembling criminals at the bar of an almighty judge.

That this important truth should be thus generally neglected and disregarded, is still more amazing when we consider, that the proofs of it are obvious to every eye, and intelligible to every capacity. They are not hid beneath the shades of philosophic subtilty, or drawn from the refinements of abstruse speculation; they are not concealed under the mysterious cover of types and allegory, or deducible only by remote consequence and strained interpretation; but they strongly force themselves upon the perceptions of unenlightened reason, and blaze out with resistless conviction in the sacred volumes of revelation. But since there is nothing so plain as not to be called in question by modern scepticism and infidelity, I will endeavour in the following discourse to shew at large,

1st, That

1st, That a judgment to come is clearly discoverable, by the light of nature originally given to all mankind, independent of any revelation, and that therefore all men, even infidels themselves, are bound to believe it.

2dly, That it was revealed in a particular manner, though less fully, to the Jews: and,

3dly, That it was revealed in the fullest and clearest manner possible in the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And, first, let us take a survey of the moral government of the world, that great volume of instruction which is open to the eye of every reasonable creature, and there the voice of nature will in the strongest terms declare to us the certainty of a future judgment: For we shall there behold virtue languishing in the shade of obscurity, or on the bed of disease, struggling with fruitless efforts against the tide of misfortune, or groaning beneath the scourge of the oppressor; destitute, afflicted, tormented:—there too shall we behold vice, with length of days in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour; in every stage of life crowned with success, and at last descending to the grave,

unappalled by human censure, unblasted by divine vengeance.

And shall we imagine, that a wise God created the world to be thus a stage of anarchy and confusion, upon which the short-lived generations of men, after having for a while been the sport of fortune, should again drop into their primitive nothing? Shall we imagine, that one event shall close the labours of the just and the unjust, and that it shall be alike to him that feareth God and him that feareth him not? Or shall we not rather conclude from this unequal distribution of happiness here, that there will hereafter be a state in which the Judge of all the earth shall clear up the present mazes of his Providence by an exact and equitable administration of justice?

This conclusion is so plain and undeniable, that we might here safely rest the cause we defend. But in a matter of so great importance God hath not commanded us to acquiesce in any single proof, or required our assent to deductions of reason, which may either escape our notice or exceed our comprehension; but he hath even implanted in the very constitution of our nature clear and incontestible evidence of a judgment to come.

For,

For, from what other cause can we deduce the common and uniform consent of mankind in approving virtue and detesting vice, even where their own interest is not or cannot be concerned? Why, in every age, hath the discharge of a just duty, or the performance of a generous action, filled the mind with satisfaction and self-applause, even where there has been neither prospect of present advantage to repay the one, nor of future fame to reward the other? Is it not clearly because his conscience tells the virtuous sufferer, that God has reserved that reward for him in heaven, which the injustice of man withholds from him on earth? Why again, for example, does the Asiatic plunderer sit joyless amidst the fruits of his rapine, or fly to the haunts of intemperance to seek refuge from his own reflections, even when his dark contrivances have escaped the eye of human justice, and he dreads not the scourges of human punishment? Is it not because he feels within him the whips and scorpions of conscience, which tells him that injured millions are crying out against him for justice, and that his crimes cannot be hidden from the eye of that God, who will hereafter give to every man according to his works? What therefore can we conclude, but that this is the voice of God and nature, which thus forcibly speaks in the hearts of all men, and by the powerful

monitions of conscience declares the certainty of a state of future retribution both to the just and the unjust? This St. Paul very clearly declares to be his opinion: "The Gentiles," says he, "which have not the law, (that is, of "Moses,) are a law unto themselves, and shew "the work of the law written in their hearts, "their conscience also bearing witness, and "their thoughts the mean time accusing or else "excusing one another, in the day when God "shall judge the secrets of all men." And surely we cannot be absurd enough to suppose, that a merciful Being would thus implant in his creatures expectations which should never be fulfilled; that he should elude the just with hopes of a reward that should never be bestowed, or terrify the wicked with a dread of punishments which he never meant to inflict.

Besides these suggestions of conscience, every man has in the constitution of his nature other principles, which will not suffer him to doubt of his future existence. For to what purpose would it have been to have endued him with freedom of choice and strength of reason, if he were doomed to lie down in eternal insensibility with the beasts that perish? Why should he have been distinguished from the trees of the forest or the flowers of the field, if, like them, after

flourishing a few days, he should be cut down, dried up and withered? Had this been the case, we should have had but too much reason to join with the pathetic lamentation of Job; that while the plants and flowers of the field are renewed at the approach of spring, yet when man goeth down to the grave, he sinks into everlasting night, and never riseth more. "For there "is hope," says he, "of a tree, if it be cut "down, that it will sprout again, and that the "tender branch thereof will not cease: though "the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the "stock die in the ground; yet through the "scent of the water it will bud, and bring forth "boughs like a plant: But man dieth and "wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, "and where is he?" Or, as the same thought is elegantly expressed in a Greek epitaph of very remote antiquity:

Alas! the tender herbs and flow'ry tribes,
Tho' crush'd by winter's unrelenting hand,
Revive and rise when vernal zephyrs call.
But men, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
Bloom, flourish, fade, and fall—and then succeeds
A long, long, silent, dark, oblivious sleep;
A sleep which no propitious pow'r dispels,
Nor changing seasons, nor revolving years *.

* Moschus epit. Bion.

But the voice of reason speaks better things than these: it tells us, that as man is distinguished here by these superior abilities from the rest of the creation; so also he is raised by them to higher hopes and expectations hereafter: it tells us, that it is impossible that God should have given him such noble faculties for no better purpose than to make him the tyrant of this lower world; but that as his conduct is directed and regulated by the free determinations of his own will, so he must be answerable for that conduct at the bar of a superior judge.

This is a conclusion so reasonable and evident, that we find it has not escaped the notice of the most unenlightened nations of antiquity. They had their infernal judges, their Tartarean cells, and Elysian fields; which, however adulterated with fable and impregnated with falsehood, and differing in circumstances, yet, consenting in the same fundamental opinion of a life after this, do plainly shew, that it is agreeable to the natural notions of sense and reason, that man is an immortal and accountable being, and must stand or fall by the sentence of a future judgment.

But it may here perhaps be asked, if this doctrine be so clear and evident to unassisted reason,

son, whence is it that we find so many doubts and so much uncertainty about it in the writings of many of the wisest men of antiquity? I answer with St. Paul, that this was a punishment inflicted upon them by God for that gross corruption and idolatry which, they continually practised against the clear light of natural information. "Because that when they knew God "they glorified him not as God, neither were "thankful, but became vain in their imagina-"tions, and their foolish heart was darkened: "professing themselves to be wise, they be-"came fools."

And even if we suppose, as some have done, that this universal consent of nations with regard to the expectation of a future judgment was not derived from the deductions of reason, but borrowed from some unknown and far-distant tradition, still this conclusion would be equally strong and cogent. For since all nations continued to embrace and approve this opinion, even after the tradition upon which it is supposed to have been founded was lost and obliterated, it is plain that it must have been, if not originally derived from reason, yet at least agreeable to its clearest and genuine dictates.

To

To me, however, this supposition of some unknown tradition delivered to the early ages of the world seems a very unnecessary, and therefore a very improbable, one. The natural perspicuity of a judgment to come seems too strong to require to be enforced by any additional evidence, unless that evidence had also brought with it some farther discovery of the nature and circumstances of it. But surely it required not the aid of tradition, the wisdom of a Pythagoras, or the sagacity of a Socrates to discover that man's existence could not terminate with the present scene of things. For let us only suppose any common virtuous heathen, when he found himself spent with age and drooping towards the grave, to take a survey of his past life; what conclusions must he draw from it, or what expectations would he form from that change which awaited him in death? Can we suppose that he would not reason with himself in some such manner as this?

"Born into the world with pain, the first "stage of my life I spent in tears, or lost in in-"sensibility; I squandered in childish trifling "or senseless amusement; condemned to folly, "inured to pain, exposed to accident. Let me "therefore turn away my eyes from such a "scene of weakness and misery to that riper "period

" period of life, in which age lent vigour to my
" body, and reason held out her friendly
" guidance to my soul. Yet what, alas! do I
" gain by thus shifting the prospect of life?
" What but the wretched exchange of smaller
" miseries for greater, and those more numerous
" ones? What a complication of misfortunes
" crowd upon my distracted memory, which
" make me look back with horror upon the
" days of my past life! what distresses have I
" encountered from the treachery of friends or
" the malice of enemies; what anguish have I
" suffered from the pressure of poverty, dejec-
" tion or disease; how many painful hours
" have I laboured for the attainment of bread,
" and how often have those labours been de-
" feated by unexpected disappointments, by ill-
" nature or fraud, by wanton mischief or op-
" posite interests and factions! I wished for
" health, but sickness soon succeeded; I wished
" for riches, but content, that sovereign balm of
" life, was wanting; I wished for children, and
" heaven sent them in vengeance to my sins,
" to rend my soul with secret pangs, to harrow
" my breast with hourly apprehensions, and
" make me feel that bitterest of earthly curses,
" a thankless child.

" And

er all, what is the prospect I
I feel the springs of life be-
in me; I feel the miseries
ent increasing, and that I
less able to resist them:
those relations and friends who might have
" supported me in this helpless state; that dear
" partner of all my joys and cares, on whose
" faithful breast I could once repose every se-
" cret of my heart; these, these have all paid
" the debt of nature, and are numbered with
" the silent dead: thus left a solitary, helpless,
" friendless being, I bend towards the earth,
" and wait in melancholy suspense for that mo-
" ment which shall bring me to the grave.

" And must I end here? Is this the period
" of my being? Is this all? Did I come into
" the world for this, to taste its bitter sorrows,
" and then, after a few, deceitful, fugacious
" pleasures to go out of it again? Can this be
" an end worthy of a reasonable being; can
" this treatment flow from a God of truth and
" equity?

" And again, if I look inward upon myself,
" what shall I think of those faculties with
" which I find myself endowed above the rest
" of

" of the creation? Shall I, who reason, who
" discourse, who look up to heaven, be at last
" reduced to a level with the beasts of the field,
" or the earth I trample under my feet? Shall
" I, who have hitherto considered myself as the
" lord of the creation, when I bid my last fare-
" well to these scenes, when I close these lids
" in death, and yonder blue regions of heaven
" darken upon me; must I then only furnish
" dust to be mingled with these herbs and
" plants; have I been set so far above them in
" life, only to be levelled with them at death?
" Is it for this I have looked up to the God of
" nature; is it for this I have laboured to con-
" quer my infirmities and subdue my passions?
" Is it for this I have denied myself the enjoy-
" ments of sin, and practised the rules of
" virtue?

" No: I will confidently make my silent,
" humble appeal to that invisible Being who is
" my last and only refuge: the God who has
" thus preserved and distinguished me in life,
" cannot forsake and abandon me in death.
" Cheerfully therefore will I resign this anxious
" being, and with willing steps explore the un-
" tried regions of the grave, in full confidence
" that it is the Divinity itself which points out
" an hereafter, and intimates eternity to man."

Such

Such then are the dictates of nature; such are the dictates of that law, which the God of nature hath inscribed upon the heart of man. Nor are the declarations of that law, which he hath revealed to mankind, less explicit in asserting and confirming the same solemn truth. I am indeed sensible that some men, and those too of great learning, willing perhaps to appear wise above what is written, have been led to doubt, whether the Jews had any knowledge of a future state. And, for my own part, I will readily grant, that there is no direct mention of a future state in the law delivered to the Jews by Moses; the sanctions of that law being altogether of a temporary nature. But notwithstanding this, that they had by some means a clear knowledge and expectation of a life to come, whether by tradition or revelation, appears so fully from the sacred volumes, as must remove every shadow of doubt from a candid and unprejudiced mind. Can, for example, any words be more clear, explicit, or satisfactory, than those of our Saviour himself, where he shews, that God had declared to the Jews the resurrection of the body, by calling himself their God? "And as touching the dead that they "rise, have ye not read in the book of Moses, "how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac,

" Isaac, and the God of Jacob: he is not the " God of the dead, but the God of the living." In the same manner the author of the epistle to the Hebrews declares, that Abraham, and with him Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs of the same promise, looked for a city which hath fouudations, whose builder and maker is God. And he afterwards recites many other of the Jewish believers, who died in faith, not having received the promises, but confessed they were strangers on earth, and sought their Father's country.

And that this was the general persuasion of the pious and wiser Jews, I think would be evident from the following passages, even if no other argument could be alledged in its favour.

When the sacred historian has recited the patience and exemplary resignation of Job, amidst the various misfortunes which befel him in his journey through life; he thus concludes his account of that holy sufferer: " Thus Job " died stricken with age and full of days; but it " is written, that he shall rise again with those " whom the Lord shall raise up."

Thus

Thus also the righteous Abel, before he fell a sacrifice to the bloody rage of his impious brother, declared his full persuasion of an immortal state: "There is," says he, "a future judg-"ment, and a judge, and a life to come: there "is both a reward for the just, and a punish-"ment for the unjust; for the world was cre-"ated and is governed by the mercy of God."

It is indeed true, that neither of these passages are in our translation of the Bible; but as the former is found in the Greek version, and the latter in two very antient* Hebrew writings, they sufficiently answer the present design of proving the great antiquity of this opinion among the Jews.

This persuasion of the resurrection of the dead and a future judgment is no less strongly declared in the book of Maccabees, by the unhappy Jewish mother and her sons, whom the

* The Jerusalem Targum and that of Jonathan Ben Uzziel. And indeed what we translate "Cain talked with Abel," is, in the Hebrew "Cain said unto Abel;" after which is a vacant space in the MS. which may reasonably be supposed to have contained the conversation of the two brothers, which preceded, and probably hastened, the murder of Abel. Vide Univ. Hist. Vol. I. p. 74. Ed. Folio.

fury

fury of an oppressive tyrant had devoted to torments and death for the cause of their religion. Thus the second son, at his last moments, addresses his murderer, in full confidence of immortality; "Thou like a fury takest us out of "this present life; but the King of the world "shall raise up us, who have died for his laws, "to everlasting life." In the same manner the third said; "These hands I had from hea-"ven, and for his laws I despise them, and "from him I hope to receive them again." Thus also the fourth said; "It is good, being "put to death by men, to look for hope from "God, to be raised up again by him: as for "thee, who thus triumphest in our destruction, "thou shalt have no resurrection to life."

Afterwards it is said, that the afflicted mother bore the death of her seven sons with a good courage, because of the hope she had in the Lord; and she said to them, "Doubtless the "Creator of the world, who formed the genera-"tion of man, and found out the beginning of "all things, will also of his mercy give you "breath and life again."

These declarations, I should apprehend, are abundantly sufficient to establish the point in question. For, however we may doubt or dis-

pute about the causes of it, we cannot but be assured, that an opinion thus confidently delivered amidst the agonies of death itself, was both certainly believed, and had also some adequate foundation.

Such then was the light which God communicated to his favourite people in antient times; dim indeed, but yet visible; obscured by the mists of ignorance and prejudice, yet full, evident, and satisfactory to the eye of faith.

But in the later revelation of his will, the doctrine of the resurrection is declared in terms so strong and expressive, as must remove every doubt, silence every objection, and fill every breast with awe and reverence. We are there not only assured, that God will judge the world in righteousness, but even the very circumstances of that judgment are described to us in the most lively colours. The heavens above, the earth beneath, the elements around us shall dissolve, to prepare the way for that tremendous solemnity. Amidst this universal consternation of nature, the shouts of angels and the trump of the archangel shall proclaim the approach of the eternal Jehovah. The graves shall hear his voice; the deep shall give up her dead; and all the generations of men shall stand before him.

Amidst this august assembly none shall escape the pervading eye of his omnipotence. "Say not "thou," says the son of Sirach, "I will hide "myself from the Lord; I shall not be remem- "bered among so many people; what is my "soul amongst such an infinite number of crea- "tures? For, behold the heaven of heavens, "the deep, the earth and all that therein is, "shall be moved, when he shall visit," and none shall escape.

Vain will be the strength of the warrior or the power of the mighty before Him who is greater than all, and in whose sight the whole world is but as the dust of the balance. In vain shall the public sinner call upon the rocks and mountains to cover his crimes from the sight of Him to whom all hearts are open; and as vainly will the secret hypocrite in that day hope to conceal his undivulged guilt from his eyes, from whom no secrets are hid. There shall riches find no place for corruption, or learning for evasion: there the titles and pageantry of the great, those glittering bubbles of a moment, shall vanish and be forgotten: the charms of polluted beauty shall there excite no admiration, the wanton follies of youth shall meet with no applause, the deliberate villanies of hoary age shall find no reverence: for God seeth

not as man seeth, neither are his ways as our ways.

Thus, then, in every view, we see the certainty of a future judgment established on the firm foundations of reason and religion. This alone, one would imagine, would be sufficient to put a reasonable being for ever upon his guard against the dangerous blandishments of sin. But I must be permitted to add another consideration, which ought to give double force to our care and circumspection:—This day of judgment is not more certain than the time of it is uncertain. We know not but the almighty Judge may at this very moment be preparing to summon the quick and the dead before his tribunal. Should this not be the case, he may command the angel of death to smite the strongest of us, before to-morrow's sun arise. And should either of these possible events happen, who sees not the dreadful certainty of being instantaneously plunged into the gulph of eternity!

How just, then, and, on every occasion, how proper is the exhortation of the Prophet to the sons of men; O Israel, prepare to meet thy God! As if he had said, "Remember, man, "that thou art no other than a stranger and "pilgrim

" pilgrim upon earth: destined for nobler pur-
" poses hereafter, thy existence is here short
" and uncertain—co-eval with the grass of the
" plain, or the flower of the field: like them,
" thou comest forth from the hands of thy
" Maker pure and undefiled: if no misfortune
" rises from the vale of misery to blast thy me-
" ridian splendour, thou bloomest perhaps for
" a few moments; but soon the evening of life
" approaches; the springs of nature decay; and
" thou art plucked up by the chill hand of
" time.

" Nor is this thy lot alone; but every thing
" around thee partakes of the same frail na-
" ture: even the most permanent of human en-
" joyments are but like the sudden flashes of
" lightning, which for a moment plays on the
" eye, and then vanishes for ever. Why then
" shouldest thou confine thy affections to a pe-
" riod thus limited, to objects more fleeting
" than the wind, more unsubstantial than the
" thin vapour? It was not to comprehend this
" short span of life that heaven bestowed on
" thee the penetrating eye of reason; but to
" take in the unbounded prospect of eternity.
" For that thou wast born: thither direct thy
" steps, and be happy."

Be it our care, then, my brethren, ever to keep in mind this important advice of the Prophet. Let us ever remember, that we are no other than travellers through this vale of tears to a happier and better country. This consideration will be at once the best guard to our virtue against the assaults of sin, and the firmest support to our hearts against the calamities of life. Should profit tempt or pleasure entice us to enter the flowery paths of vice and corruption; it will remind us of the vast disproportion between the momentary gratification of a depraved appetite, and those unfading pleasures which await the just at the right hand of God. Do we groan beneath the cruel hand of oppression, or sink under the load of poverty? Do we lament the child of our bosom, or pour out our tears for the friend of our heart? Do we labour under the unmerited reproaches of slander, or languish on the bed of sickness and disease? Is there any other difficulty, any other misfortune or calamity which can befal us in our present state; this advice of the Prophet will enable us to support it with courage, by teaching us to turn our eyes from the gloomy prospect of this life towards that peaceful region, where no clouds of affliction are seen, no storms of adversity are heard, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.

Having

Having then such an asylum in view, let us not be faint in well-doing; but with patient perseverance toil up the steep ascent of virtue. Let us carefully cultivate the seeds of faith in our hearts, and bring forth the fruit of good works in our actions. Thus shall we answer the ends of our creation; thus shall we be prepared to meet our God with gladness; and to receive from him that transporting eulogium, "Come, "ye blessed children, receive the kingdom pre- "pared for you from the foundation of the "the world."

SERMON XLVII.

2 Cor. v. 10.

We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or evil.

HAVING in a former discourse explained the fundamental evidences of a judgment to come, as deducible both from reason and revelation, my present intention is to address myself to three sorts of men.

1st, To those who would seem to doubt of this fundamental doctrine.

2dly, To those who profess to believe it, but do it not fully and sincerely: and,

3dly,

3dly, I shall add a few words of consolation to those who do really and constantly believe it.

And 1st, In addressing myself to those who would seem to doubt of this fundamental doctrine of a judgment to come, I shall not endeavour to shew the unreasonableness and folly of those arguments and objections on which they pretend to found their doubts: I will rather content myself with putting the whole matter upon this short and plain issue: that if we should for once be so kind as to suppose, what they will never be able to prove, that it is a very doubtful thing whether there be another life after this; that it is possible that all these notions of a judgment hereafter, of heaven and hell, are mere fables, the invention of policy, or the produce of superstition; yet, granting all this, I will clearly shew that it is our duty, if we act wisely, and consult our own safety, to believe and live as if these doctrines of religion were certainly and infallibly true.

And the truth of this, I think, will sufficiently appear, if we consider,

1st, What little hazard he runs, and how little loss he undergoes, who believes and acts according

according to the principles of religion, should his expectations at last prove false; and,

2dly, What a desperate hazard he runs, and what a dreadful situation he will be in, who does not believe and act according to the dictates of religion, should they at last prove true.

And 1st, All that he can lose or venture, who acts agreeably to the principles of religion, and in expectation of a life to come, is only some present gratification and enjoyment of his sensual appetites. He crosses, indeed, the irregular inclinations of his nature; he forbears every criminal excess; he is solicitous about the concerns of another world; he ties himself to the observance of some strict duties and rules; and is, perhaps, exposed to the reproaches of evil men, and the contempt of an evil world. And this is the worst that can possibly be said of his case by infidelity itself. But then, on the other hand, is he not conscious of acting up to the dignity of his nature? Do not those virtues and austerities, generally and in the natural course of things, ensure to him health, reputation and fortune? Has he not a contented mind and peace of conscience here? Is he not animated and supported by joyful hopes hereafter? If then he be in the right, he is happy for ever:

and

and if he be mistaken, his condition is at least not worse than that of other men; he can but lie down in silence with the forgotten multitudes of former ages. In one word, he is safe, if his hopes be false; and if they be true, he will be unspeakably happy for ever. But, on the other hand, consider what a desperate hazard he runs, who does not act according to this belief of a future state. For the sake of a few momentary gratifications, he stakes all that can be called valuable or desirable. On a precarious and fallible opinion he ventures the fate of eternity. If it be true, his eye-lids must soon be closed in death, and then he has no hope beyond the brute that perisheth. But if it should be false, tell, Oh! tell him, ye accursed in hell, the pains of the worm that never dieth, and the fire that cannot be quenched.

Surely then we may be allowed to conclude, that even if a judgment to come were a thing doubtful, yet it is our interest to live and act agreeably to the principles of religion, rather than our own corrupt lusts; since in the one case we must be safe, and in the other we run the dreadful hazard of being for ever miserable.

I proceed, 2dly, To address myself to those who profess to believe a judgment to come, but yet

yet do it not heartily and sincerely. And this, I fear, is the case of the generality of Christians. For if we look around us in the world, we shall find but too much reason to enquire why the promise of eternal life, than which there cannot be greater, has so little power and influence upon the minds of men, does so little excite their affections. Whence are their endeavours so cold and languid, as if it was a matter of no concern or no importance to them?

The sad truth is, that the generality of Christians, whatever they profess, either do not heartily believe this doctrine, or else do not duly consider it. Would but God Almighty be graciously pleased to indulge to us a sight of those future rewards and punishments which he has revealed in the Gospel; would he give us a view of these glories which are in his presence for evermore; would he unbar the gates of hell, that we might for a moment see the miseries and torments of the wicked; perhaps we may think we should want no farther conviction or argument. But God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts: he governs men in a method suited to their reasonable natures, and has given us such assurances of another life as are abundantly sufficient to satisfy and convince the understandings of men;

men; but yet may be resisted by those who shut their eyes against the truth, and resist clear and sufficient evidence. And from this obstinacy in resisting the evidence of a judgment to come, arises a considerable part of that indifference which many profess about it.

There are others, in whom this indifference about futurity arises not so much from a want of knowing the truth, as from a neglect of considering it. For though the understanding may be convinced, yet it has not such an absolute power over the will, as to determine it always to what is best and fittest; but after our understandings have yielded, our wills too often stubbornly hold out against the powers of reason; especially where the truths proposed are contrary to our fleshly lusts and worldly interests. It is not enough, therefore, that we believe the great truths of religion, unless we also can prevail upon ourselves seriously to attend to them. And the only way to do this, is frequently to revolve them in our minds; in an hour of retirement, to set the temptations of the world at a distance from us; to weigh the immense value of the happiness that is offered to us, and the greatness of the misery that is threatened; to look forwards for the end of this vain and transitory world; to consider that solemn word eternity;

eternity; to remember how sad and deplorable our everlasting state will be, if we make no provision for it; and how infinitely the unfading happiness of heaven exceeds the fleeting vapours of joy which this life affords.

These things in a lively manner represented to our minds, will by degrees so captivate our wills and affections, that we should learn to look upon future happiness in earnest as our greatest good, and future misery as our greatest evil. And when this is the case, we shall not be far from the kingdom of God. For the belief of future judgments, when seriously attended to, will soon awaken our consciences, stifle the seeds of wickedness, overcome the power of temptation, and enable us to bring forth fruit unto eternal life.

But the misfortune is, there are a thousand concurring circumstances which occupy the attention of mankind, and withdraw their thoughts from futurity. Some, I hope many, believe the certainty of a future judgment; but they are so engaged with the cares and riches of this world, that they are not at leisure to attend to the concerns of a better. Others are willing to enjoy a state of future happiness, but they think it time enough yet: they would enjoy life as long as they

they can, and therefore defer the cares of eternity to a more convenient season. Others acknowledge their belief of a state of eternal happiness, but they are not satisfied with the means of obtaining it: they think that there is a nearer and more compendious way to salvation, and therefore, despising the plain road of sense and Christianity, strike out into the crooked windings of imagination and novelty. Others chearfully begin the journey of virtue, but have not resolution to pursue it to the end: they meet with some little difficulties and discouragements in the way; the prize they have in view is distant: their courage therefore fails them, and they fall back into the snares of sin. A few there are, I hope, among us, and may God encrease their number, who relying upon the promises of God, and preferring them before all present enjoyments and possessions, chearfully look forwards to eternity: and, though they meet with rubs and difficulties, yet are not discouraged, but go on in the good way of faith and holiness.

To these I shall, therefore, in the third place, address myself in a few words. And much it is not I need to say. It may all be contained in that noble advice of the Apostle, "to hold fast "the profession of their faith without wavering."

This

This will teach them what to do, without the help of an instructor; it will force them to do well, without a guide or monitor. It will fortify their minds against all temptations from the world and its bewitching enjoyments; it will set them above its smiles or frowns. For how can he, whose thoughts are fixed upon thrones, and kingdoms, and immortal glory, be diverted by the gay toys or glittering baubles of the world? All it can offer is too little to tempt the sincere Christian. When his soul is transported by faith beyond the stars; when it soars to those happy regions where his God and his Saviour dwells, how mean and contemptible, how vile and sordid, do all things here below appear! When the whole earth itself appears but as a point to him when he looks down upon it; how little will he covet that small portion of it which any one man can enjoy? His faith, therefore, will teach him to keep his eye fixed beyond the present scene of things: he will behold the world dissolved, and all the pomp of it vanishing: the curtain of mortality being drawn aside, there will appear to him new heavens and a new earth, wherein are honours and pleasures of a more durable substance than those which now usurp the name. His faith, therefore, will inspire him with new courage and activity, and will teach him to count all things but loss for

the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. Even life itself will not be dear to him, if he may but win Christ, and be able through his merits, to finish his course with joy.

The time would fail me to set before you the noble trophies and victories which faith has achieved. You may find many of them recorded in the epistle to the Hebrews; where the Apostle, for the encouragement of all true believers, sets before us the illustrious examples of the Patriarchs and Prophets of old, who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, out of weakness were made strong, were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection; had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were slain with the sword, wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.

These were the exploits of the saints and servants of God under the Old Testament, who had not so clear a revelation of a future reward as we have under the Gospel. But far greater yet, and more stupendous, are the triumphs of faith in the holy lives and patient sufferings of the primitive martyrs and confessors of Christianity,

tianity, who with invincible constancy endured pains and torments to flesh and blood insupportable, assisted and upheld by the grace of God, and a lively faith in the promises of his Son. They clapped their hands and sang praises in the midst of scorching flames; they took patiently the spoiling of their goods, and even rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus; knowing that their afflictions, which were but for a moment, would work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory in the heavens.

Let us then go on in the imitation of their exalted virtue. Let it be seen by our words and by our works, by all we do, and wherever we are, what our faith and hope is. Let it appear to all men that we walk by faith, and not by sight; that we look beyond things temporal, to those that are eternal.

And whatever others may think or say of us, let us not be ashamed of our design. Let our actions convince them, that it is our wish, not to be happy for a few days or years, but for ever: that we are therefore resolved so to use the world as men that must shortly leave it; so to husband our days, as knowing that time will

shortly be no more, but be swallowed up in eternity.

And though the reproaches of foolish men, or the evils we endure, may afflict our souls, yet let us not be cast down. Their malice cannot go beyond the grave: there the wicked must cease from troubling; for the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. And at that awful moment, when they shall stand together before the judgment-seat of Christ, how different the fate of the righteous and the wicked will be, let the voice of inspiration tell you. "Then shall "the righteous man stand in great boldness be- "fore the face of such as have afflicted him, "and made no account of his labours. When "they see it, they shall be troubled with ter- "rible fear, and shall be amazed at the strange- "ness of his salvation, so far beyond all they "looked for. And they repenting and groan- "ing for anguish of spirit, shall say within "themselves; This was he, whom we had some- "times in derision and a proverb of reproach. "We fools accounted his life madness, and his "end to be without honour: But how is he "numbered among the children of God, and "his lot is among the saints!"

SERMON

SERMON XLVIII.

JER. xiii. 23.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.

AS a long and frequent practice can take off the difficulty of doing some things, so it equally strengthens and confirms the difficulty of leaving others. By a long and laborious train of thinking, we familiarise to ourselves many philosophical truths; by an industrious application to practical sciences, we overcome things seemingly insuperable, and do them with a natural readiness and facility. Every repetition of thought, and every returning season of action, strengthens the former, till use is gradually turned, as it were, into the genuine operation of original nature. Thus, in the natural world, mountains and hills by perseverance are

brought low, and rocky places made smooth; and as in the natural, so in the moral world, there are few things which will not yield and become easy to the labours of firm resolution and unremitting assiduity.

And, on the other hand, a long and habitual practice of things makes it as difficult to leave them, especially where there is a strong and fixed inclination, co-operating with the power of custom. What we love, we are unwilling long to lose by absence or forgetfulness: and the more pains we have taken, the longer we have gone on in any indulgence, the more repugnance we feel to quit and forsake it.

In nothing does this appear more, than in the case of habitual sinners: in nothing can we find a greater difficulty, than in the transition from a wicked and perverse life to a life of virtue and religion. It is an Herculean labour indeed to reclaim those, who, by a settled course of iniquity, have confirmed themselves in their wickedness; to destroy those sinful impressions which are engraved upon the stony heart of the sinner, as with the point of a diamond. For though sin may not have so far darkened his understanding that he cannot see his true interest, yet habit has so far enslaved him that he is unable

able to pursue it. He has drunk in such full draughts of ungodly counsel, he has stood so long in the way of sinners, and delighted himself in the seat of the scornful, that, in the language of scripture, "his neck is become an iron "sinew, and his brow brass." And when this is the case, what power on earth can bend or mollify him? what charm can bring him back to God and his duty? "Can the Ethiopian "change his skin, or the leopard his spots? "Then may ye also do good, that are accus- "tomed to do evil."

I need not perhaps inform you, that these words are a proverbial speech, expressing the extreme difficulty of reforming a man who has been long given up to vicious habits of mind, of erasing those blots which have long stained the soul and deformed the reason of man. No art or contrivance can give whiteness to the Ethiopian, or destroy the natural spots of the leopard. Whatever is natural and essential to a subject, cannot be entirely taken away without the destruction of the subject itself. Wherever, therefore, there is an Ethiopian there will be blackness, and where there is a leopard there will be spots. These are their distinguishing characters, which can only cease with their existence. And though the case is not strictly the same

with regard to the sinner, because sin is not of the essence of his nature, yet the comparison very aptly represents to us the great difficulty, nay, I had almost said, the impossibility, of cleansing a sinner from his habitual pollutions.

The first appearances of evil in tender minds are often easily corrected and subdued. It does not require much strength to turn the bias of their inclination, and give them a direction towards heaven and heavenly things. But it is much otherwise with a long experienced sinner, who has neglected God and all the concerns of religion, perhaps from the first dawnings of reason, and has cultivated nothing but error, folly, and rebellion; indevotion towards his Maker, an injurious conduct towards his fellow-creature, and all debasement and abomination towards himself. When this is the state of a sinner, and unhappily it is the state of thousands and ten thousands, it is surely no common or easy task to recal his wandering steps, and to correct the confirmed depravity of his mental constitution: it will require no ordinary strength to disarm the strong man, who has so long and so successfully had the dominion over conscience, and to whom the sinner has on all occasions paid a blind, implicit, and slavish obedience.

Should

Should we doubt the truth of this, let us make a few experiments in the way of reformation:—attempt to take away the relish of forbidden pleasures from the man who has eat, drunk, and lived in frolic and thoughtless dissipation for the greater part of his life: attempt to check the sensual thirst of the confirmed drunkard, and turn it to those fountains of living waters, which, instead of destroying his constitution, would nourish him up to eternal life: attempt to divert the man of the world from his eager pursuit of riches, or his schemes of destructive ambition, and to raise his affections from earth to heaven; from perishable treasures to God, the supreme and unchangeable good:—make these experiments, and you will soon be satisfied that the restoration of an habitual sinner to God and his duty, is no easy matter; nay, falls but little short of changing the Ethiopian's skin, or the leopard's spots.

From what then does this extreme difficulty arise? We know that every advantage, both as to the present life and another, demonstrably lies on the side of virtue and religion; what therefore can induce the sinner to prefer error to truth, misery to happiness, and to rush, as it were, with his eyes open, into the wide-yawning gulph of perdition?

To

To solve this apparent mystery, we must look back a little to the effects which habits of sin produce in the human mind.

The first of these is, that they enlarge and strengthen our affection to it.

When we have long dwelt in the tents of iniquity, and have been helpers and fellow-workers with the powers of darkness, the bent of our minds is so strongly impelled that way, that we need not much solicitation, if any, to commit iniquity. Our natural appetites hankering after sin, and dwelling with pleasure upon the remembrance of sinful enjoyments, we do not stay for temptations and incentives to the practice of it, but rush upon it with a thoughtless violence and temerity, as a horse rusheth into the battle; and instead of repelling the attacks of our deadly enemy, throw ourselves into his destructive embraces.

And in this state, lest any thing should disturb our fallacious repose, we studiously shun whatever might tend to awake our sensibility, or excite the alarming convictions of conscience. The church of God is unfrequented, the ordinances of religion are despised, the ministers of Christ and their holy office are ridiculed, and

the society of good and virtuous men is avoided. Our pleasure is only to associate with those, who, like ourselves, are joined to an idolatrous worship, and serve the same master; till at length, partly by our own corrupt passions, and partly by the influence of evil and contagious example, we are brought to so great a degree of stupefaction, that we not only commit all uncleanness, but commit it with greediness; we not only work iniquity ourselves, but have pleasure in them that do the same, and esteem it our meat and drink to promote the interests of sin, Satan, and the world.

2. Another necessary effect of habitual sin is, that it is prejudicial to the reason and understanding.

And this is an effect of sinning, which makes it truly difficult to bring about the reformation of the sinner. For when the mind through sin has received a wrong direction; when the understanding is darkened, and reason given up as a prey to the devil; when there is neither ear to hear, eye to see, nor any power remaining by which we can discern the truth and reality of things; where shall the wisdom of God make its entrance, to instruct us in the things which belong to our peace? By living in the willing practice

practice of sin, we become strangers to that which is the best and most distinguishing part of us; we lose the faculty of judging betwixt what is good and what is evil; we confound the natures and qualities of things; we unite what are essentially different, and separate what ought to be joined together in firmest union. And when this is the case, it must be a labour of much difficulty to make him quit his old path, and to lead him into the ways of everlasting happiness. It will be difficult to change his apprehension and judgment of things, and make him incline to that holy word, which would be a light to his feet and a lamp to his path, and direct him to that Being, who is the everlasting fountain of light.

A third effect of habitual sin is, that it tends to harden the heart, and thereby fortifies it against every thing which might convince the sinner of his folly.

At our first entrance into a sinful life, we commit iniquity with some fear and shame. Our hearts and consciences condemn us, and sometimes lay us under awful apprehensions of a judgment to come. But, by long practice of sin, these two natural restraints fall off: and neither the fear of God, nor the shame of being seen

seen by men, are able to divert us from our wicked courses. At first, we only were guilty of less sins, and perpetrated them, perhaps, in secret, and with a reluctant mind, and were tormented with fearful presages of a future reckoning in our midnight and serious hours of reflection. But, by a frequent repetition of them, we learn to discard the sensations of modesty, and those things, which we were once ashamed even to speak of, we can now transact with unfeeling audacity, and defend with unblushing assurance.

It is a just as well as ancient remark, that no man becomes extremely wicked on a sudden. Before a man comes to a state of Ethiopian blackness, he must undergo a great deal of toil and labour, must be industrious for some time, and use many painful exertions to silence the checks and admonitions of conscience. For, though he be fallen from his original glory, by the commission of some sins, yet he is not deficient in all good and virtuous inclinations: he has yet some remains of what is praise-worthy, the boundaries of which he cannot pass without charging himself with manifest folly. It is no easy matter to conquer those frightful apprehensions which naturally beset a guilty mind, and which cannot be appeased by the darkest retirement:

ment: it is no easy matter, at first, to venture upon a wilful transgression of God's holy and righteous laws, when we know that this will infallibly expose us to the resentment of that God who will one day take severe vengeance upon all the impenitent workers of iniquity. Yet, notwithstanding all this, such is the insinuating nature of sin, that it can bring us, step by step, to such a degree of wickedness, as to make us shake off all natural abhorrence, disregard the monitions of conscience, and be fearless of that God who is a consuming fire.

And this callous insensibility will extend itself to every part of our conduct in life. There was a time, perhaps, when we felt some compunction for neglecting the public worship of God; but, by habitual carelessness as to this divine service, we become perfectly easy and sedate in the omission of this duty, and, like multitudes in this age of impiety and immorality, can perfectly satisfy our consciences, though we rarely or never approach either the temple or altar of God; or perhaps even never name them, but for purposes of ridicule and profaneness. Thus again, he who formerly thought it a crime of deep dye, not to honour his father and mother, by long and frequent repetitions of disobedience, comes at last to transgress the commandment

without shame, and without any terrifying intimations from within. He who at first was cast down and disquieted at the review of any disloyal act against the great Sovereign of the world, by long habits of profane cursing and swearing and blasphemy, learns to commit his impious insults against Heaven with the most daring defiance and hardened insolence. Should the Almighty say to him, If I be a father, where is mine honour? his reply would be, Who is the Almighty, that I should serve him? Thus a long series of sinning stupifies the soul, and thereby makes it commit every species of iniquity without hesitation, and review the commission of it without compunction.

And when a sinner has thus overcome the force of conscience, and thrown it into a lasting insensibility, as a consequence of this, he is fortified against every thing which might tend to convince him of his folly. Having strengthened himself in his wickedness, he calls hardness of heart peace of conscience, and the stupor of insensibility quiet of mind; "I shall have "peace," says he, "though I walk in the "imagination of mine heart, to add drunken-"ness to thirst." It is in vain, therefore, to call to him to forsake the evil of his ways, and turn his feet to the testimonies of God. He is

not

not conscious of the magnitude of his guilt, and therefore, when the great God beseeches him to return to him, he will say, wherein shall I return? He is not sensible that he is sick, and therefore cannot be persuaded that he needs a physician.

Neither, therefore, the public administration of God's holy word, the affectionate counsel of friends, nor the visible severity of God's dispensations, can check the obdurate pride of his heart, and make him sensible that he is treading the paths of hell and damnation.

Well may, therefore, the task of reclaiming an habitual sinner be compared to that of changing the skin of the Ethiopian, or the spots of the leopard!

Let this, therefore, teach every one that hears me the extreme danger of going on in sin, in the foolish presumption that he will be able to return to a life of religion and virtue, when advancing age or increasing infirmity remind him, that it is now high time to make his peace with God.

2. Let it imprint on the minds of my young hearers the necessity of being under the early influence

fluence of religion.—"Remember thy Creator," says the wise man, "in the days of thy youth." —Acquaint thyself with God betimes, and be at peace with him; that so thou mayest prevent those evil days, in which, through a confirmed habit of sin, thou art insensibly treasuring up to thyself wrath against the dreadful day of wrath and final indignation. Our first impressions, we all know, are generally the strongest and most durable. He, therefore, who in the dawn of life is made acquainted with the God of his fathers, and serves him with a perfect heart and willing mind, seldom deserts his first love, and turns the stream of his religion to other gods. The child that is trained up in the true knowledge of God, the eternal Creator of all things, and Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, seldom grows weary or faint in well-doing, or departs from the good way in which he ought to go. Of all the modes of reformation, therefore, which have been either suggested or attempted by benevolent minds, it must be obvious to every one, that there is none so likely to be attended with certain and permanent success, as the early instruction of young persons in the knowledge of God and their duty.

Finally, according to the Apostle's advice, let us exhort one another daily, whilst it is called

to-day, lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and thereby exclude ourselves from the rest which remaineth for the people of God. Let us beware how we venture upon sin, and accustom ourselves to do evil, lest we arrive to such an impenitent hardness of heart, that we shall never be able to learn to do well. Let us believe in Christ and obey his Gospel, who alone can wash away the stain of sin; who alone is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

SERMON XLIX.

JOHN v. 14.

Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.

AS our blessed Saviour was going up to Jerusalem, to keep the second passover, he came to the pool of Bethesda, which was near the temple, and famous for the many miraculous cures performed there. For, as the Evangelist tells us, "an angel went down into the pool at a "certain season, and troubled the water, and "whoever first stept in, after the troubling of "the water, was made whole of whatsoever dis-"ease he had."

Now as Jesus was passing by this place, he cast his eyes upon a deplorable object, a paralytic man, who had kept his bed for eight and

thirty years, and had all that time waited in vain to partake of the sovereign virtues of these troubled waters. Our Saviour, struck with compassion for his unhappy case, said unto him, "Wilt thou be made whole?" The paralytic answered, "Sir, I have no man, when the water "is troubled, to put me into the pool; but "while I am coming, another steppeth down "before me." Upon which our Saviour was moved with compassion and healed him:— "Rise," says he, "take up thy bed and walk. "And immediately the man was made whole, "and took up his bed and walked." And not long after, Jesus, finding him in the temple, gave him that important caution contained in the word of my text, "Behold, thou art made "whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come "unto thee."

Now this poor paralytic, who was afflicted so many years, is a natural image of those poor afflicted sinners who come to the altar of God to seek the spiritual cure of their souls. We have all of us infirmities of long standing, which bow us down to the earth with shame and sorrow: we have all of us, therefore, need to fly for help to the great Physician of our souls. And behold, here is the pool of Bethesda, at which he may be found! Here is the spiritual healing, by which

which we may be made whole! For in the holy Sacrament Christ is ever present to heal our infirmities, to wash away our past guilt, and to seal the forgiveness of our sins by his precious blood.

My intention is, in the following discourse, first, to make some observations upon the literal sense of the text; and, secondly, to shew the greatness and excellence of that cure which Christ grants to us in the Sacrament;—"Behold, thou art made whole."

And first we may observe, that our Saviour found the paralytic man in the temple, when he addressed him in the words of the text. His infirmity had doubtless deprived him of the comfort of going there for many years: but as soon as he was healed, his first care was to go to the house of God.

It is indeed too common with those who have escaped any imminent danger, or received any signal mercy, to return to their farms, and their merchandize, and their yokes of oxen, regardless of the hand of Providence that preserved them in the hour of danger and the day of distress. But the poor paralytic man had not so learned his duty. His first business was to go

to the temple of God, and there offer up his tribute of praise and thanksgiving to that almighty power, whose mercies he had just experienced.

We may observe, secondly, that the bodily cures, which our Saviour wrought upon the sick, were all preparatory to those spiritual graces he afterwards bestowed upon them. Thus when he met the paralytic man in the temple, he first puts him in mind of the miracle which had been wrought upon him; that his healing was not a common or imperfect recovery, subject to relapse, or requiring time and regimen to confirm it; but compleat and instantaneous; that so by duly weighing the greatness and excellence of the miracle, by comparing his past misery, under which he had languished for so many years, with his present vigour, he might be the more deeply sensible of the mercy bestowed on him, and thereby the more disposed to receive also the benefit of spiritual healing.

For the same purpose also our Saviour gives him that important caution, "Sin no more." It is indeed very dangerous to judge of men's characters by their good or bad success in life, since God often sends his severest chastisements upon his most faithful servants: yet it is plain from

from our Saviour's words, that this poor man's infirmity was the consequence of his sins. Well knowing, therefore, how prone men are to forget in prosperity the resolutions and vows they make in the day of distress; he cautions him against relapsing into those sins which had been the cause of his former misery;—"Behold, thou "art made whole; sin no more."

And, that this remonstrance might make the deeper impression, he adds to it a severe threatening of some new and greater torment;—"Sin "no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee." Whether by this our Saviour meant another distemper worse than the former, or rather the pains of another life, in comparison of which all his past sufferings were nothing, is not clear. It is however plain, that he intended to awaken his fears, and to deter him from the commission of sin, by reminding him of the horrible punishment that would ensue:—"Thou art made "whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come "upon thee."

Such are the remarks which obviously offer themselves upon a view of the literal sense of the text. And I hope it will not be thought foreign to the subject to lead your thoughts from thence to the consideration of that spiritual

healing, which the same Redeemer offers to true believers in the Sacrament.

The vices of the soul are frequently represented in scripture under the image of diseases and infirmities, for which Christ has procured a remedy. And indeed diseases they are, of a most dangerous and malignant nature. For bodily disorders only affect our temporal happiness, and, at the worst, only hasten the decay of this our earthly tabernacle, which sooner or later must return to the dust from whence it was taken: but our sins fill us with fear, remorse, and despair, and make us subject to that death eternal, which is the wages of sin.

Now in this sense we are all sick, more or less, and stand in need of a cure: we have all been guilty of such sins as are inconsistent with the profession of the Gospel.

For let me ask even the most righteous; Have you never offended God against the conviction of your conscience? Have neither the pleasures nor temptations of the world persuaded you to exceed the bounds of virtue? Has the love of gain, or the hope of advantage, never enticed you to fraud, injustice, or perjury? Has envy, hatred, pride, wrath, drunkenness, lust,

lust, or strife, never led you to forsake God, or injure your neighbour? More than man must he be, who can declare himself free from such stains of iniquity; for whilst we have our treasure in earthly vessels, we cannot reach the spotless purity of angels.

Now the holy Sacrament is a sovereign remedy against all these evils of the soul: it is a sacred laver which cleanseth us from all pollution: it is a refuge and asylum which Christ offers to all repenting sinners.

The first excellence of the holy Sacrament is, that, like the pool of Bethesda, it is an universal remedy. Let none therefore imagine that their sins are too great for its virtues. Contemplate on the cross of Christ: consider that shameful and ignominious death which we there commemorate: remember the infinite value of the Lamb that was slain for us; and then judge if any sin can be too great to be washed away by his blood. It would be injustice to confine the merits of his death to a few offences, which are inseparable from humanity. God would never have required so great a sacrifice for these, as the death of his Son; nor would that death have been of much comfort to man, if it had only reached to some sins and excluded others.

For

For such is human frailty, that even the best men sometimes fall into heavy sins: miserable therefore must have been our expectations, dark and dreary the path that leads to the grave, if we had any doubts of the universal efficacy and extent of Christ's death. But, thanked be God, we are not left in the dark in this important point:—There is no condemnation to any that are in Christ Jesus, let their sins have been ever so great or many.—"Come unto me all that "travel, and are heavy laden, and I will give "you rest," is the language of our Redeemer: his invitation is general, his pardon is universal.

And as this pardon is universal, so likewise, secondly, it is a free gift, without any merit of ours.

The paralytic man in the text had done nothing to make him particularly worthy of our Saviour's compassion: yet Christ condescends to restore health and vigour to him. And it is the same with the mercy that is offered to every communicant: it is not due to our sorrow, our repentance, our good works; but it is the free gift of God through Christ. It is indeed true, that faith and repentance are required of us as conditions of our being pardoned: for it is by no

no means fit that God should shew mercy to those who shew no shame or sorrow for having offended him. Yet the pardon is free, since, let our contrition be ever so great, there can be no proportion between our sorrow and the remission of all our sins against a God. God the Father appointed the means to save us, and formed the plan of our redemption, of his own free goodness: God the Son has freely procured it for us, by suffering in his own person the punishment due to our sins: and God the Holy Ghost applies the benefit of those sufferings to every particular person:—all that we can contribute to it on our part, is, to have a lively sense of our sins, and a deep sorrow for having committed them. We must come to this pool of Bethesda with faith and penitence; but it is God alone who can give the healing virtue to its waters. With the profoundest reverence therefore should we always say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto "us, but unto thy name give the praise, for thy "loving mercy and for thy truth's sake."

A third excellence of that pardon which is offered to us in the Sacrament, is, that it is full and compleat, without any delay or defect.

The progress of bodily diseases is generally slow and uncertain: the sick man recovers by slow

slow degrees, and it is a work of time to renew his former strength and vigour. But in our spiritual healing it is commonly much otherwise. Christ says to us, as he said to the paralytic man, "Rise, take up thy bed and walk." We never approach the table of the Lord with repentant hearts, but we go from it with nobler and stronger dispositions to virtue: our faith is confirmed, our fears allayed, and our hopes are cherished and invigorated. Those, indeed, who have long continued in a habit of sin, are not so easily and so readily cured and strengthened: it will require time to extirpate old habits, and to plant new ones; yet their pardon is at the first as surely obtained, and their salvation as fully sealed, as that of others, if they only cultivate the good seed sown in their hearts, and endeavour to bring forth fruit unto perfection. Let not therefore the remembrance of their former sins too much deject them; let them rather look forwards with confidence and consolation. For the same Redeemer who pardons their past sins, will also provide for their future wants: his strength will assist their weakness; his love will cherish their feeble efforts to goodness; his hand will guide them on from strength to strength; and his arm will support them against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

But

But we are not to suppose, that this great blessing requires nothing to be done on our part, or that we are allowed to continue in our sins. Christ will indeed pardon our sins past, provided we forsake sin for the time to come: it is indeed his to give health to the sick, but it is our's to preserve it. This was what he expected from the paralytic: this is what he expects from every one of us; "Behold, thou art made whole; sin "no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee."

Yet great as these mercies are, which are held forth to us, there are too many who wickedly and shamefully neglect them. They reject all the offers of their heavenly Physician, and are contented to live on in their miserable and paralytic state; the slaves of sin, the servants of corruption. Christ daily addresses himself to them in those affectionate words, "Wilt thou "be made whole?" He exhorts them by his word, he warns them by his ministers, he knocks at the door of their hearts by his grace: every blessing you receive, every affliction you suffer, are so many warnings, which cry out to you that are spiritually sick, Will you be made whole? will you accept of my peace and my salvation? But, alas! we fear to be healed, and refuse the helps which he so kindly offers: we forsake the Church and Sacrament, because we will

will not forsake our lusts and sins till age or sickness begin to summon us to the grave. And then, when God writes bitter things against us; when the iniquities of our youth alarm our consciences; when the decays of nature place death and judgment before us; and, in short, when we are able to sin no longer; we then send for our spiritual guides, and request to be partakers of the holy Sacrament: as if the one could teach us to live, when we are going to die; or the other could wash away those sins, which we are determined never to forsake.

But suffer not yourselves, my christian hearers, to be deceived in this point by mistaken notions or deceitful practices. It is indeed the practice of too many to neglect both the worship of God and his holy Sacraments; to bid defiance to the commands of God, the ordinances of man, and the repeated exhortations of the ministers of the Gospel; and in spite of every invitation, advice, remonstrance, and reproach, to remit the care of their souls to the last moment of their lives. But if ever there was any practice dangerous and blameable, this is certainly so. The man who is guilty of it cannot truly be called a Christian, because he renounces his allegiance to Christ, by disobeying his positive commands. He cannot

not believe the Gospel, for the whole tenor of the Gospel is entirely against it; its folly hath been unanswerably again and again exposed, and its danger evinced by the clearest and most convincing reasons. If therefore men will stand out and persevere in a practice, which they cannot but know to be wicked and indefensible, they must pay for their folly; but let them remember, that eternal damnation is a sad price to pay for it!

But as for you, who better know the gift of God, and the value of that pardon which is offered to you, faithfully continue to draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort. Be assured, that your prayers and penitential sighs will all be heard before God; your sins and frailties will all be washed away in the blood of the everlasting covenant; your faith will be confirmed and strengthened; your pious resolutions accepted; your hopes cherished and enlivened; and your expectations raised above the petty views of this vain and perishing world, to an inheritance undefiled in the heavens. And after a life thus spent in obedience to the will of God, whenever it shall please him to visit you with sickness unto death, you will then be able to bid adieu to the world with comfort,

fort, and to say with the transport of good old Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant "depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy "salvation."

SERMON

SERMON L.

JOHN v. 14.

Afterwards Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.

I HAVE already taken occasion from these words to point out the great excellence and advantages of that spiritual cure, which is offered to us in the holy Sacrament.

I shall now proceed to shew, that it is the duty of every communicant to abstain from those sins which have been there forgiven; and, secondly, to point out those dangers and inconveniences to which men expose themselves by relapsing into their former wicked habits.

"Sin no more," said our Saviour to the poor paralytic, whom he had healed, and "sin no

"more" he also says to every communicant at his holy table. What then, does God expect from us a perfect and unsinning obedience? Can mortal man attain the purity of angels? Happy indeed were such a state; but it is a happiness not to be attained in this life: perfect holiness, free from any mixture of sin, is a gift reserved for heaven, and the privilege of angels and glorified saints: but whilst we remain upon earth, and have a soul subject to the impressions of matter and the tumults of passion, we must also be subject to sin. St. James says, "In "many things we offend all;" and we begin our addresses to God with acknowledging ourselves miserable sinners, who have erred and strayed from his ways like lost sheep. When, therefore, you are exhorted to sin no more after receiving the holy Sacrament, the meaning is, not to commit any flagrant and enormous vice; not to continue in the practice of known and habitual sins.

And these sins may be reduced to three sorts.

1st, There are sins of maliciousness, which suppose in them that commit them an entire freedom of will, and sufficient light to hinder them from falling into them, if they had been willing. The unhappy man who is drawn into

sin

sin by a sudden impulse of his senses and passions: who has neither time nor thought to reflect upon what he is going to do, deserves our tenderest pity: but he who commits sin willingly and deliberately, against the clear light of reason, and the cool remonstrances of his conscience; who enters into it with design, and continues in it with delight; can neither be a fit object of man's pity here, nor of God's mercy hereafter. Against this kind of sin, therefore, every worthy communicant should guard his heart: it is in every man's power to do so, and dreadful will be the consequences if he does not: for however we may flatter ourselves with vain hopes, if God be true, the wages of such sin is death eternal.

2dly, There are sins of infirmity, into which we are drawn by the weakness of our nature and the violence of our passions, which are but too apt to rise up in arms, and rebel against our own reason.

Now if the subject of these sins should be of dangerous tendency; such as theft, adultery, false witness, perjury, murder, or any other crying act of injustice or revenge; a Christian should use every effort to prevent his being overcome by them; not doubting of success;

for though temptation be strong, yet God's grace, if we will seek it, is stronger. If, therefore, we fall, the fault is in ourselves, from a want of a due use of those helps which are afforded us. For to what purpose serves our reason, our christian knowledge, and all those succours of grace which heaven bestows in pity to man's weakness, if we suffer ourselves to yield to every attack of Satan, and are led captive at his pleasure? However indulgent, therefore, the Saviour of the world may be to the accidental failures of infirmities or passion, he has no where promised forgiveness to those who are a prey to every temptation. If, therefore, we have once fallen in any of the sins I have mentioned, our repentance must closely follow our fall; and we must also stand upon our guard for the future, if we mean to obtain his favour, who commands us to sin no more.

3dly, There are sins of habit, custom, and inclination, which are dangerous, and cannot consist with a devout participation of the holy Sacrament. Of this sort are all those prevailing customs of lying, swearing, thieving, drunkenness, and fornication, which, the scripture tells us, exclude men from the kingdom of heaven. Amongst this number also we may reckon many things, which, however little regarded by the world

world as criminal, yet are fatal to our eternal salvation; such as an immoderate love of pleasure or riches, an habitual coldness and inattention in prayer, a disregard of the Sabbath, a neglect of the Sacrament, and, in general, an idle and unthinking life, which, though it is not stained with any flagrant sins, yet discovers no sense of religion, no warmth of piety, no zeal for God's honour, nor is adorned with any of those virtues and graces which constitute the new man, and distinguish the Christian from the Heathen.

These are the sins which every devout communicant, which every true Christian, ought to avoid. And surely it is but a small thing which Christ requires of the sick whom he has made whole; it is but a small return for that spiritual health and pardon which he so freely offers to us, that we should sin no more. And yet, even in this, he does not tie us down to the rigour of the law, but judgeth us by the mercy of the Gospel: He does not declare vengeance against every slip of our frail nature, or exact a holiness without spot, an obedience without imperfection: No: He only requires that we seriously hearken to his voice, when he speaks to us by his word, by his ministers, and by our own consciences; that we do not yield to every temptation,

tion, and fall a prey to every lust; that we do not persevere in habits of known and wilful guilt; but that we endeavour, as far as our weak nature will admit, to copy after his bright example, and to direct our paths with sincerity towards the gate of heaven and eternal life. This is all that he requires; and surely less he could not require from those for whom he shed his blood.

And this we in the most solemn manner bind ourselves to perform, every time we approach the altar of God. For the Lord's Supper is not only a religious rite, instituted by Christ in remembrance of his death, but it is likewise a religious obligation on our part, by which we oblige ourselves to serve God; by which we bind ourselves to crucify all worldly desires; and devote ourselves, our souls, and our bodies, to that God who gave them being. Every sacrament, therefore, which we receive, is a renewal of those promises and vows which we made at our baptism: it is a solemn oath, which we swear to God upon the symbols of the body and blood of Christ: it is a good confession, which we witness before men and angels, that we have renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil; that we have enlisted ourselves under the banners of our Redeemer;

deemer; and that we are resolved, by God's grace, to fight the good fight of faith.

2dly, And surely, after such a declaration as this, we cannot want to be convinced, that to return back to our former sins must be attended with great danger.

In the distempers of the body relapses are always dangerous, and often fatal; and they are not less so in the distempers of the soul: and the danger ever increases in proportion as our returns to sin are more frequent; as I shall endeavour to make appear to the meanest capacity.

And 1st, Relapses into sin are fatal, because they make us more familiar with vice, and take off a great deal of that shame and fear, which at first restrained us within the bounds of our duty. By often falling we fancy ourselves unable to resist, and therefore cease to use our efforts against the attacks of sin: we quit our guard, and slacken our resolution, and thus are a ready prey to every sin that besets us. Our conscience, indeed, that faithful witness which God has placed within us, will from time to time lift up its voice, will cry aloud and spare not, will haunt the sinner's midnight slumbers, and paint

his guilt, his folly, and his danger, in their proper colours: but even that will at length grow weary of its useless task, and leave the man who suffers himself to be repeatedly drawn into sin, to a state of final impenitence and ruin.

2dly, Relapses into sin are fatal, because they weaken the sense of God's grace in us, and therefore render the conversion of the sinner more burdensome and difficult. After the first or second fall into sin, men easily rise again; their guilt is not confirmed by habit, and the Spirit of God works strongly within them to stop their danger and ruin. But as their guilt increases, the difficulty of their recovery increases also: for evil practices confirmed by habit become a second nature: it will therefore require a more extraordinary assistance of God's Spirit to break through this unhappy state of confirmed wickedness. But where, alas! shall this extraordinary assistance of divine grace be had or expected, when our sins have driven away the Holy Spirit? Where shall the streams of mercy be found, when our past abuse of it has dried up the fountain of divine goodness? Where shall we look for aid, when the God of Jacob is no longer our help? And such he certainly will not be to the hardened and daring sinner: for whatever help

help he may grant to the infirmities of his offending children; how great soever the riches of his goodness and long-suffering may be towards the sincere, though frail, Christian; yet they may be wearied out by repeated ingratitude and unfruitfulness. He knows whereof we are made, and therefore will not be extreme to mark what is done amiss: but if neither his exhortations, nor warnings, nor blessings, nor threatenings, nor diseases, nor afflictions, can awaken us to a sense of our folly, and keep us from falling, he does not then say, "Sin no "more," but he leaves us to our own counsel, to walk in the ways of our heart, and in the sight of our eyes.

And in this, 3dly, consists the danger of frequent relapses into sin. For God having withdrawn himself from the sinner, and left him to the guidance of corrupt nature, he has no longer any strength to rise and repent. His repeated crimes add weight to his yoke, and it is impossible to break it without help from above: he is such an utter stranger to repentance, that he knows not how to set about it: and if he should, his guilt is so complicated, that he knows not where to begin: the sins of his youth and the iniquities of his riper years are so many, that he is afraid to look back upon his past life: they

they are a sore burden, too heavy for him to bear, yet he has not the courage to cast them off: he wishes to repent, yet dares not begin the dreadful task: and thus between guilt and fear; between the struggles of conscience and the temptations of sin; between the ineffectual wishes of repentance and the unavailing hopes of mercy; between the bounds of time and the moments of eternity; the poor unhappy sinner lingers on in terror and irresolution, till death snatches him away, unprepared, to answer for his sins at the bar of a just God, and from thence to dwell for ever with everlasting burnings.

Such then is the folly, such the danger of suffering ourselves to relapse into sin. Be it our care, therefore, whilst we have it yet in our power to avoid them. We may, indeed, find it hard to sin no more; but we shall find it much harder to bear those never-dying torments which will await us in the next life, if we continue in our sins. Our temptations to sin may be strong; but our motives to abstain from it are still stronger. Whenever, therefore, we are tempted, if we would only put into one scale the pleasure or profit we hope to gain from the commission of any sin, and into the other that worse thing which will befal us if we commit it,

even

even the everlasting burnings of hell; we could not hesitate one moment which we ought to chuse: for little should we be profited, if we should gain the whole world at the expence of losing our valuable and immortal soul.

Whenever, therefore, we approach the altar of God, let it be with a full resolution to sin no more, when we consider that we are the sick that have been made whole; when we reflect that our cure was purchased at no less a price than the blood of the everlasting Son of God; let us determine not to trample upon so great a blessing, not to reject the riches of his goodness towards us; lest a worse thing befal us. And may that God, who supports the feeble knees, so strengthen our pious resolutions, that we may faithfully keep them here, and be everlastingly rewarded for them hereafter.

SERMON LI.

1 PETER iv. 18.

If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

IT has ever been the practice of wise and judicious men to describe religion in amiable colours, as the child of God and the friend of man; easy in its services, benevolent in its duties, and advantageous in its end; and thus to invite and allure men to the love and practice of a system of duties, all whose ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths peace. And happy were it for the cause of religion, had all its advocates been disposed to pursue the same wise plan. But there never have been wanting gloomy and injudicious zealots, preachers of a sad countenance, who have taken a pleasure in representing it not as lovely, and of good report; but as severe and forbidding; full

full of difficulties and dangers; supported by a God of terrors; hard in its performance, and hazardous in its issue.

And perhaps nothing has afforded greater countenance to the injudicious opinions of these men, than a misapplication of the words of the text.—" St. Peter," say they, " lays " it down as a certain and undeniable truth, " that the sinner and the ungodly have every " thing to fear from the justice and anger of " God; and that even the most perfect Chris- " tians, even the righteous themselves, will " scarcely, and with much difficulty, be saved." And from hence they take occasion to expatiate upon the many temptations to evil, the difficulty of observing the precepts of the Gospel, and the severity of the Judge, to whom we are to give an account of our thoughts and actions.

Were this representation true, melancholy indeed and miserable would our situation be! dark and gloomy would our prospect appear; joyless and insupportable the path that leads to the grave, if to the miseries of the present life were added these alarming uncertainties of happiness in the next. Little encouragement should we have to endeavour to conquer our infirmities, to subdue our lusts, to struggle against the

power

power of temptation, if after all our pains, the event of our labours were precarious and doubtful. Small reason also should we have to love God, little ground to rely on his mercy, if, after so many repeated declarations of his goodness and love to all men, he should scarcely, and as it were with reluctance and regret, suffer even the righteous to be saved.

But I hope I shall be able to make it appear, that this rash and inhuman opinion is neither countenanced by the general scope and design of the Gospel, nor by the words of St. Peter contained in the text.

And, first, let it be previously remarked, that by the righteous here mentioned, St. Peter cannot mean those who are perfectly and altogether righteous, who have never committed sin, but have fulfilled the law of God without offending even in one point: for such a righteousness belongs to the Son of God alone, who knew no sin: and were it possible that men should be possessed of it, they would be so far from being scarcely saved, that heaven would be their just right, and the due reward of their virtue. But by the righteous are here meant those who sincerely, though imperfectly, endeavour to arrive at perfection; who have put

off

off the old man, with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. And that this is the true signification of the word righteousness, appears by the opposition made in the following words of the text. For as by the sinner and the wicked we are to understand those who are generally and habitually so; who refuse to submit to the yoke of Christ and obey his Gospel; so by the righteous we must understand those who are sincerely and habitually obedient to the dictates of Christ; who endeavour to live, not after the flesh, but after the spirit; though with such stains and mixtures of imperfection as will ever cleave to this our frail and mortal nature.

Now if such righteous men as these shall scarcely be saved, the difficulty of their salvation must be ascribed to one of these three causes: either to the holiness and justice of God, which hinders their happiness; or to our Saviour, who has not sufficiently provided for their salvation; or, lastly, to the severity of the Gospel precepts, and the difficulty of fulfilling the conditions upon which salvation is offered: all which reasons, upon a fair examination, will appear very trifling and insufficient.

And,

And, 1st, This difficulty cannot with any shew of justice be ascribed to God. For God is so far from desiring to make salvation difficult to good men, that he affirms the contrary, with an oath, in the strongest terms:—"As I live," says he, "I have no pleasure in the death of "the wicked, but that the wicked turn from "his way and live." Now if God is desirous of the conversion and life even of the wicked, we cannot doubt that he has at least an equal desire for the salvation of those who sincerely endeavour to make their calling and election sure by the practice of good works. To such, therefore, our Saviour accordingly promises the good-will of God, and tells them, that "it is "their Father's good pleasure to give them the "kingdom." And in another place he says, "the kingdom is prepared for them from the "foundation of the world." St. Paul also says, "Ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." And upon another occasion our Saviour tells his hearers, "This is the father's will, that of all "which he hath given me I should lose no-"thing, but should raise it up at the last day." If, therefore, salvation be difficult to the righteous, it cannot be ascribed to God, who would have all men to be saved, and lay hold on eternal life.

Nor, 2dly, can this difficulty of salvation be ascribed to Christ: for it would be an affront to him and his Gospel, it would be an undervaluing the efficacy of his death and resurrection, to suppose that he did not sufficiently provide for the salvation of his beloved children and faithful servants; or that he did not remove all impediments that stood in their way to happiness. And, indeed, what could be done more than Christ has done to purchase salvation for us? He has concealed nothing from us that was necessary for us to know; he has withheld nothing that could make us wise unto salvation. He has shewn us the only true God and eternal life: he has brought life and immortality to light, and he has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light: he has laid our duty before us in the plainest terms, and he has given us the strongest motives and helps to perform it. —"This do, and thou shalt live," is the plain and constant language of Christ and his Gospel. And what we were unable to do, he has done for us, by satisfying the offended justice of God, that he might deliver us from the condemnation of sin. And that he might effect this mighty deliverance for us, he became obedient to death, even the death upon the cross. He bore our sins in his own body upon the tree, that he might obtain eternal redemption for us. He disarmed

disarmed death of its sting, and stripped the grave of its terrors: and that he might still continue his kind offices to us, he is now ascended into heaven, to prepare a place for us, to intercede for us at the throne of God, and to send down his Holy Spirit to support our hearts, and strengthen our weakness against all the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. And now then, after all this, to pretend that he has not done enough to assure his children of salvation; to complain that the way to eternal life is rugged or inaccessible; to affirm that even the best men can scarcely be saved; what is this but to betray the highest degree of ingratitude to God and his Son? what is it but to affront his Gospel and his grace? what is it but to make his death and sufferings ineffectual? what is it but openly to give the lie to inspiration, which explicitly tells us, that "Christ is "a merciful high priest, who is able to save "them to the uttermost that come unto God "by him?"

But then, 3dly, may not this difficulty of the salvation of the righteous proceed from their own imbecility and corruption, and the difficulty of performing the precepts of the Gospel? I answer, it is impossible to maintain this opinion, without supposing God to act in contradiction

to himself. For, if it be true, that God is willing to do us good, and make us partakers of his happiness; if it be also true, that the Saviour of mankind has done all that could be done to put us in possession of that happiness, it contradicts every idea of reason and justice to suppose, that that happiness should be offered to us upon hard and almost impracticable conditions. What! shall God so love the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life? Shall Christ come into the world to save them that believe in him? Shall he spare neither instructions, nor promises, nor even life itself to save us: and yet, after all, throw such impediments in our way, clog the discharge of our duty with such difficulties and embarrassments, prescribe such severe and rigorous conditions, that even the sincere and true Christian shall scarcely be saved? Such a supposition is surely too contradictory to the wisdom and equity of God, too shocking to the reason and humanity of men, either to require or deserve a serious answer.

Since then God is always disposed to bestow eternal happiness upon his creatures; since Christ has done every thing that was possible to facilitate the attainment of it; since, lastly, the

the conditions on which it is offered are neither grievous nor impracticable; there can be no ground for supposing, as some have done, that it was the intention of St. Peter to affirm, that even the most perfect Christians, the righteous themselves, will scarcely, and with difficulty, be saved.

What the real intention of St. Peter was in the words of the text, will best appear from considering the general scope of the epistle from which they are taken. It appears to have been addreſſed principally to the Jews of the diſperſion, who had been lately converted to the Christian faith. And as it was written at a time when the church of God was falling into divers temptations and fiery trials, it was the design of the Apóstle, throughout the whole epistle, and more particularly in the chapter from which the words of the text are taken, to comfort these new converts in their Christian warfare, to strengthen them against the evils which he foresaw would come upon them, and by every argument in his power to induce them to persevere in the faith of Christ. For this purpose, he first warns them not to be surprised at any thing which might happen to them on account of their religious perſuaſion:—"Beloved," says he, "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial

" which is to try you, as though some strange " thing had happened to you." On the contrary, he tells them, these sufferings ought to be matter of joy; inasmuch as they led to that glory, with which the past sufferings of their great Master had been rewarded:—" But re- " joice," says he, " inasmuch as we are par- " takers of Christ's sufferings, that when his " glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also " with exceeding joy." And also, " If ye be " reproached for the name of Christ, happy are " ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth " upon you." But at the same time, lest any of them should mistake the nature of these sufferings and rewards, he wisely guards them against imagining that they should be entitled to any reward, who suffer, not for Christianity, but for their crimes.—" Let none of you," says he, " suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or " as an evil doer, or as a busy body in other " mens matters; yet, if any man suffer as a " Christian, let him glorify God on this behalf." He then proceeds, in the verse before the text, to represent those evils, to which the Christians were to be exposed, as a sort of judgment which God exercises upon good men in this world, to purify and reform them, that they may be able to stand in the great day of account.—" The " time is come," says he, " that judgment must " begin

" begin at the house of God;" that God should visit and chastise his faithful servants for their sins here, that he may spare them at the last day. He then adds, " And if judgment begin " at us, what shall be the end of them that " obey not the Gospel of God? And if the " righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the " ungodly and the sinner appear?" that is, if good men, for whom salvation is reserved, have yet so much to suffer here, before they arrive at heaven; if they must pass through afflictions as the consequence of sin, what have the wicked and impenitent to fear? If we, whom God has adopted as his children, and for whom he has done such great things, have so many evils to undergo, before we can be made perfect, what will become of those who persecute and afflict us; who are guilty of the worst and most flagrant sins? If those sore judgments which hang over this unhappy nation, will fall so heavy upon us, who by faith are the house of God, what will be the end of those stubborn, wicked, and incredulous Jews, who have rejected the counsel of God against themselves, and dipped their hands in the blood of the Messiah? Surely, if we have much to fear, and much to suffer from these impending calamities, they much more: if we who are righteous shall

scarcely be saved from them, where shall these ungodly and sinners appear?

And that this is the true meaning of this passage of St. Peter, is strongly confirmed from the words which follow it, in which he encourages the Jewish converts to bear their sufferings manfully, by assuring them of the assistance of God, and his fidelity in rewarding them:— "Let them that suffer," says he, "according "to the will of God, commit their souls to him "in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." Thus we see, that what the Apostle calls in the text being scarcely saved, he here calls being saved by suffering according to the will of God, who, as a faithful Creator, would not fail to reward their constancy by giving them that crown of life which was laid up for them.

Should this sense of the words require any farther confirmation, we need only look back to the Book of Proverbs, from whence they are taken.—"The righteous," says Solomon, "shall "be recompensed in the earth, much more "the wicked and the sinner." It is evident that Solomon does not speak of heaven or eternal salvation, but of the afflictions and chastisements which God, as the Supreme Judge, dispenses to his

his children in this life, either to prove or correct them; "The righteous shall be recompensed "in the earth." And if God chastises even good men in this life, to correct their sins, and lead them on to perfection, much more will the wicked and the sinner feel the severity of his judgments.

And this is agreeable to God's eternal decree, who will give to every man according to his work. Not indeed always in this life; for he sometimes, for wise reasons, suffers the way of the wicked to prosper, and triumphant guilt to insult over injured innocence. But, sooner or later, they will feel the vengeance of a just God: for though to us short-sighted mortals, the execution of his judgments may seem to be delayed; yet to Him, whose eyes reach to the remotest consequences of action, and to whom a thousand years are but as one day, the crime and its punishment are equally present, and succeed each other in that wise and just order which he hath appointed, who cannot err.

Nor let the righteous repine, though it be their lot to be afflicted and mourn. The Captain of their salvation was made perfect through sufferings, and the servant must not expect to be above his Lord. Nor let them be dejected, though

though their sufferings be many; or despair of entering into glory, though it be through much tribulation. For though they shall scarcely be saved, yet they shall surely be saved; though, like the Israelites of old, the sea is before them, and the hostile bands of Egypt darken their rear; though "they are entangled in the land," and the mountains of Pi-hahiroth have shut them in; yet the God of Israel is able to divide the waves, and "to lead the children whom he "has redeemed to the promised land; to guide "them in his strength to his holy habitation." To Him, therefore, let them ever "commit their "souls in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator," who will preserve and raise them up at the last great day to life everlasting.

SERMON LII.

PSALM xciv. 7.

They murder the widow and the stranger, and put the fatherless to death: and yet they say, Tush! the Lord shalt not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.

IN the beginning of this psalm, the author, addressing himself to God, to whom vengeance belongeth, gives us a pathetic picture of the deplorable condition to which the Israelites were reduced by the insolence, injustice, and impiety of their * heathen invaders.—"They smite down thy people," says he, "O "Lord, and trouble thine heritage: they mur-

* Some commentators think that this psalm refers to the wickedness committed in the court of Saul, or to the injustice of the kings and judges in later ages.—Vide Patrick, &c.

"der

" der the widow and the stranger, and put " the fatherless to death."—Thou sufferest them to commit every outrage with impunity, to prosper in wickedness and triumph in the midst of their unparalleled guilt: and now, behold, what are the fruits of this lenity and forbearance? what conclusions do they draw from this long-suffering of the Almighty which prompts him to spare their crimes, and delay the avenging stroke of justice?—"Tush," say they, "the " Lord * shall not see, neither shall the God of " Jacob regard it."—We have been so long suffered to go on in sin without any visible mark of divine displeasure, that it is now very clear to us, that the Almighty seeth not our guilt, neither doth the God of Jacob regard it.

To correct, therefore, so foolish and dangerous an opinion, the Prophet goes on to address himself to them in this just and solemn reproof:—" Take heed, ye unwise among the " people: O ye fools, when will ye under- " stand? He that planted the ear, shall he not " hear? Or he that made the eye, shall he not " see? Or he that nurtureth the heathen, it " is he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not " he punish?"

* *Cannot*—Green.

And

And would to God this reproof of the Psalmist were only applicable to the poor heathen idolaters, to whom it was originally addressed; who were lost in native ignorance and hereditary superstition, and therefore had something to plead in mitigation of their folly! But there are, I fear, even among the more enlightened disciples of the blessed Jesus, too many who stand in need of the same reproof; who, like these untutored heathens, from being long permitted to add sin to sin, like them also say, "Tush! the "Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of "Jacob regard it."

To obviate, therefore, the contagion of so fatal a delusion, so far at least, as lies within the power of an humble individual, I shall make it the business of the present discourse,

First, To assign some probable reasons why God so long suffers the wicked to go unpunished: and,

Secondly, To shew the folly and danger of being thereby induced to continue in sin.

And first, Let it be considered that the immediate punishment of sin would entirely contradict and subvert the whole plan of God's moral

moral administration. He formed the world as a theatre of probation and trial, on which the sons of men were to act their respective parts, as candidates for his favour and an immortal inheritance. On the one hand, he placed before them the pure and permanent satisfactions of virtue; on the other, the specious, but deceitful, allurements of vice. To the virtuous he promised the palm of eternal glory; to the vicious he denounced the torments of endless misery: to all he gave a freedom of choice, and, to direct that choice, superadded the noble and instructive faculty of reason, and the powerful monitions of conscience and grace. And thus, having placed before them good and evil, he left them in the hands of their own counsel, to be the authors of eternal happiness or misery to themselves.

Here then is a scheme of administration worthy the prudence of an all-wise Being; a plan becoming the benevolence of an all-merciful Creator; which, at the same time that it furnishes men with the means of happiness, lays no restraint upon that freedom of will and liberty of action, which are the essence of virtue, and the only foundation of reward.

But

But now, should God think fit to change the methods of his Providence; should he annex an immediate reward to virtue, and inflict an instantaneous punishment upon vice; the whole of this beautiful structure must fall to the ground, and the present scheme of divine administration must become absurd and unintelligible. How should the world then be called a state of probation, intended to try the faith, and exercise the constancy of mankind? For what trial could there be of faith and constancy, when vice had nothing to hope for, and virtue nothing to suffer? What again would become of that freedom of choice which is the basis of merit, and the characteristic distinction of human nature? Would not man, in effect, become like the arrow in the hand of a giant; a mere instrument, impelled by the irresistible agency of a superior and over-ruling power? For, who could chuse to revolt from virtue, when he saw it inseparably connected with present happiness; or who would dare to prefer vice when he beheld the flaming hand of Omnipotence upraised to blast his choice with instant vengeance? And, lastly, what would become of those noble ornaments of human nature, fortitude and patience, under afflictions, an inflexible integrity amidst temptations, a generous and disinterested goodness, a firm and faithful trust in God?

Or how could these, or indeed any other virtues, be exercised in a state, where every thought would habitually be trained to spring from the narrow views of self-interest, and every action be guided by the mercenary expectation of present reward?

Thus we see then, that the impunity of the wicked is absolutely necessary, according to the present plan of God's moral administration.

And secondly, The design of this impunity is no less evident, in consistency with the same plan, with respect to the sinner himself.

"As I live, says the Lord, I have no plea-
"sure in the death of him that dieth, but ra-
"ther that he should turn from his sin and be
"saved: Turn ye, therefore, from your evil
"ways; for why will ye die, O house of Is-
"rael?" Here then is the golden key of knowledge, which unlocks that mystery of God's forbearance and the sinner's impunity, which perplexed and entangled so often * some of the wisest and most faithful of God's servants of old, who were ever ready to cry out, in the submissive, yet anxious, language of the prophet

* David, Jeremiah, &c.

Jeremiah,

Jeremiah, "Righteous art thou, O Lord, and "true are thy judgments: yet let me talk with "thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the "way of the wicked prosper? wherefore do all "they prosper that deal very treacherously?"— Sensible of the infirmities of this frail nature with which we are endued, our almighty Parent does not surprise the sinner with sudden vengeance, does not cut him off in the midst of his crimes and pleasures, but allows him time to recollect his dangerous condition, and to wash away his past guilt with the tears of repentance and contrition. Nay so far is he from being thus extreme to mark what is done amiss, that, on the contrary, he endeavours by every kind and winning method to prevent his ruin. He warns him by the soft whispers of conscience, when he might wound him with the stings of scorpions: he corrects him with the rod of love, when his sins have deserved a rod of iron: he leads him forth beside the waters of comfort, when he might justly have given him the tears of affliction to drink: he awakens his gratitude by the mercies of an indulgent father, when his crimes call for the severity of an incensed judge.

And for the truth of this, I need only appeal to every man's own conscience. For who is

there, even among the best of us, who is not, in an hour of reflection, sensible that God has long borne with his frail and perverse disposition, has suffered him to add sin to sin, and spared him from time to time, when he deserved punishment? Wherever we turn our eyes, we meet the mercies of his indulgent providence, and trace the footsteps of his kindness to us miserable sinners. In the day-time he has guided us with his almighty arm, and in the night season hath watched over us for our good. On the bed of sickness he hath comforted our drooping spirits, and in the hour of distress hath been our merciful refuge and support. Amidst the dangers of unguarded youth he hath preserved us from falling, nor hath he cast us away in the time of age, or forsaken us when our strength failed. And, what is of all blessings the most important, whilst thousands have fallen beside us, and ten thousands at our right hand, he hath prolonged our day of grace, and allowed us time to return and be saved. And all this he hath in mercy done, notwithstanding our repeated refusal of his mercy, our continued abuse of his love, our contempt of his threatenings, and our utter disregard of every thing he hath desired or commanded.

But

But though the kindness and forbearance of God be thus great and signal; yet,

Secondly, It is the height of folly and madness to be thereby induced to continue in a state of sin and impenitence.

And here I would first recommend it to the sinner to consider, that though the vengeance of God may be slow, yet it is certain and unavoidable. He may indeed, for a few moments, riot in the spoils of the murdered widow, and triumph over the injured stranger or defenceless orphan: but his crimes will not always escape the notice of heaven: in the book of remembrance are they all written. The God of Israel doth not slumber or sleep. He that made the eye, the great fountain of light and knowledge, distinctly seeth, and will as assuredly punish, the guilt of the impenitent sinner. Though he suffer long, he will not always: though his mercies are over all his works, yet is his justice equally extensive. His forbearance and pity are a necessary refuge for the frailties of weak and fallible men, but were not intended as an encouragement for obstinate and deliberate offenders. If therefore we chuse to make a contrary use of them, and to convert what was designed for our advantage

into our ruin, the fault is entirely our own, our blood must be upon our own heads.

Let the sinner farther consider, that by thus abusing the mercy and forbearance of God, he adds to his other crimes those heavy ones of obstinacy and presumption. God has expressly declared, that "though hand join in hand," though the sons of wickedness combine their united efforts, "yet shall not sin go unpunished." Now for the sinner, after such a declaration as this, to go on in his sins, what is it but to call in question the veracity of the eternal God, and impiously mock at his avenging thunder? And can we suppose that he who dwelleth on high will overlook such outrageous insolence; that he will suffer his creatures to trample upon his authority, and despise his power with impunity? Would it not, even in our own judgment, debase the majesty of God, should he not vindicate the honour of his laws, and by his terrors convince a guilty world that he is a God of justice as well as mercy?

> "A God all mercy is a God unjust."
>
> *Night Thoughts*, No. IV.

What, therefore, hath the sinnner to expect but the severity of vengeance, and those torments, which

which are the just recompence of his impious presumption and ingratitude?

But even should God inflict no particular marks of displeasure upon the sinner, but suffer him, as it sometimes happens, to go on and prosper in his wickedness even unto the end; yet let him not vainly imagine, that the arm of the Almighty is shortened, or that he shall finally escape his vengeance. He hath said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay it:" and what he hath said, he will surely perform; for his words are not written in sand, or scattered by the wind, but will stand fast when the pillars of heaven are shaken, and the foundations of the earth are removed.

And indeed this total forbearance of God is often one of the heaviest and surest marks of the divine vengeance. For as he sometimes afflicts in mercy, so also he spares in anger. He fixes the time of our repentance, and allots a day of grace, beyond which he will no longer extend his mercies. And if the sinner goes beyond this fatal moment, his doom then is unchangeably fixed; the gate of mercy is then for ever shut, and God will be no more intreated: he does not then endeavour by his judgments to reclaim him from his evil ways, but suffers him to add sin to sin,

and to fill up the measure of his iniquity: he does not warn him by his corrections, or awaken him by his grace, but finally gives him over unto death.

And when this is the case, how dreadful, how beyond description dreadful, must the situation of the sinner be! What bitter agonies of soul must he feel when he considers, and every man will some time or other be brought to such a state of consideration, that he has forfeited every hope of salvation, and has now nothing to look for but the just rewards of his folly and impiety; when he reflects that he has offended that Majesty of heaven which can strike him dead in a moment; that he has ungratefully despised the Father of mercies, in whom alone he lives, and moves; who has supplied him with every comfort he has enjoyed in life, and has so long borne with his obstinacy and impenitence!— And whither can he turn his eyes, where he will not find something to remind him of his folly; or whither can he fly to hide himself from the all-seeing eye that spieth out all his ways? If he looks upwards, the host of heaven, which obey the voice of their Creator, upbraid his rebellious disobedience; if he looks downwards, inanimate, yet obedient, nature proclaims his guilt, as the only rebel of the creation: if he wakes,

wakes, the terrors of conscience surround him: and when he lieth down on his bed, can he forbear reflecting, that, while the very beasts of the field are safe under the protection of that God who neither slumbers nor sleeps, he alone is exposed defenceless to the dangers of the night, and may, ere to-morrow's sun arise, awake in the flames of hell?

Nor is this an imaginary picture of the situation of the sinner who hath abused the clemency and forbearance of heaven, but it is founded on truth, on the word of that God, who is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. Can any man, therefore, forbear to ask in all the terms of the most profound astonishment, what is it then that throws a veil over the eyes of men, and prevents their seeing these solemn and interesting truths? Whence is it that the whole world is buried in sin, and all flesh have corrupted their way before God? Whence is it that the drunkard glories in his intemperance, the swearer in his impiety, the adulterer in his lusts, the covetous in his oppressions, though the strength of Israel, who cannot deceive, hath declared that he both seeth and will assuredly punish the man who doeth these things? Will the sinner plead, that it is want of thought which hurries

him on to the commission of sin? What! shall the lord of the creation, shall he who is allied to angels and made in the image of God himself, plead that as an excuse for his crimes, which would reduce him to a level with the very beasts that perish! Can it be consistent with a reasonable being to want thought, when the dye is casting for eternity! Can he, who is so deeply anxious about the possessions of this uncertain life, be thoughtless about an inheritance that fadeth not, an immortal possession! No: it is impossible: however men may pretend to plead thoughtlessness as an excuse for their sins, I cannot persuade myself that they arise from hence: it is not mere inattention that makes men wicked: the root of evil lies deeper, and is of a more deadly and malignant nature. Is it then the pleasures of life that allure the sinner and draw him from his duty?—The pleasures of life did I say? Rash and mistaken language! We talk of them indeed, and, in the morning of life especially, spring eagerly forwards, as if we were sure of filling our grasp with these rose-buds of the spring: but where are they; or in what happy region are they found? Not surely in this vale of tears, not amid the changes and chances of this mortal life, where pain and disease, where sorrow and disappointment are ever predominant, and where even our best enjoyments

ments are but like the visionary forms of the fleeting cloud, or the fantastic images which nature depicts on the winter's ice. What madness then is it to stake that which has no foundation or existence, against a certain and eternal inheritance; to barter away the hopes of salvation for the short satisfaction of a brutal gratification; to exchange the treasures of an incorruptible happiness for the imaginary enjoyments of a trifling and uncertain moment! Will the sinner plead, that he is enchanted by the flattering pursuits of life and the busy engagements of the world; by the thirst of fame or wealth: by the love of honour and the schemes of ambition? And what then are all these, wealth, honours, dignity, and fame, about which mankind are making this endless bustle, to which they sacrifice their present ease and future hopes? What are they but the toys which the blind capricious hand of fortune scatters at random, and can again snatch from us at every hour? Alas! ye men of insatiable desires, who so eagerly grasp at the honours, the riches, the power of the world, go to the tombs of your ancestors, who are now mouldering around you, and learn from them the value of these things. Ask them, whether all the honours they enjoyed, whether all the riches they amassed, be equal in value to the least of God's slighted mercies,

mercies, or whether the most exalted dignity of the world could be any compensation for the loss of his favour? Suppose one of those unhappy wretches who are now mourning, amid endless torments, their past folly, for a moment to burst the barriers of the grave, and to stand in awful form before us; what answer would he return to this question, or in what language would he address himself to those, who, like himself, abuse the clemency and forbearance of God? May we not justly suppose, that he would speak to the deluded sinner in some such words as these:

"From the regions of eternal darkness, where "the worm never dieth and the fire is not "quenched, I come, misguided mortal, to warn "thee of thy danger, lest thou also fall into "this place of torment. Like thee, I once "abused the mercy and forbearance of the Al-"mighty; like thee, I trod the paths of life, "regardless of the God who gave me life; like "thee, I toiled to add field to field, to fill my "barns, to extend my power; like thee, I "defrauded the unwary, and oppressed the in-"nocent; I murdered the widow and stranger, "and put the fatherless to death. And now, "behold the sad reward of all my labours; be-"hold in me a woful example, in what thy own

" labours will certainly end. Condemned as
" I am to eternal torments, it were now better
" for me that I had crawled a loathsome insect
" on the earth, or howled a savage monster
" in the desert, rather than to have been born
" a man, than to have inherited the powers of
" reason and the hopes of immortality. And
" yet, wretched as I am, amidst all the mi-
" series which surround me, I feel none so
" heavy as the cruel remembrance of my past
" folly in despising the divine mercy, which
" so long waited for my repentance, which so
" tenderly and often invited me to return and
" be saved. My other tortures do indeed ex-
" cruciate this wretched body; but this wounds
" and pierces my soul: the flames of hell do
" indeed drink up my blood; but it is this
" which kindles and increases the destructive
" fire. Could I consider God as having been
" mine enemy; could I charge him with any
" severity or injustice; could I forget that I
" might have been happy, if I had not by my
" obstinate refusals of his mercy solicited mi-
" sery; could I forget, that I should never have
" trodden these paths of darkness, if I had
" not first wilfully trodden the steps of sin; I
" might then have some excuse for my folly, I
" might then have some comfort, even in these
" regions of unutterable distress. But ah! the
" veil

" veil of error is too late removed from my " eyes! Too late the tears of contrition now " witness the sincerity of my repentance! Too " late I fall a prostrate suppliant at the unre- " lenting throne of divine justice! There was " a time when the gate of mercy was open to " me; when I had a merciful Redeemer in " heaven to intercede for me, and a Holy Spi- " rit on earth to guide and protect me; when " God himself condescended to invite me to " accept of the terms of salvation: but now " those happy moments are irrecoverably gone, " and the Almighty no longer appears to me as " an indulgent father, but as an inaccessible " God, and an inexorable judge.

" These advantages, however, unthinking " mortal, are still thine, are still in thy power, " if thou wilt embrace them. Immersed as " thou art in sin, God still waits for thy re- " pentance, and affords thee the means of sal- " vation; Christ still intreats thee by his mi- " nisters, by his word, by his sacraments, by " the all-powerful eloquence of his blood; the " Holy Spirit still remains with thee to inspire " thee with holy thoughts and pious resolutions, " to confirm thy faith, and guide thy wan- " dering steps into the way of peace. Let " therefore my voice warn thee not to reject " them,

" them, lest thou also come into this place of " torment."

Such, my brethren, is the voice of truth, such is the language of reason! And happy were it for us, could each of us be persuaded to attend to their sober dictates! But, alas! such is the infidelity of the present age, that truth and reason weigh little with some men; and such is the unhappy perversion of others, that they would not be persuaded, even though one actually rose from the dead.

All therefore that can be done is to take up the pathetic lamentation of the Psalmist, " Mine eyes gush out with water, because men " keep not thy law;" still, however, fully determined, under every discouragement, to discharge our duty as faithful shepherds over the flock committed to our charge, that is, frequently and earnestly to remind them of the danger of their situation, and to declare to them the certainty of those heavy judgments, which God Almighty has pronounced against those who abuse his mercy and forbearance: to tell them, that however they may seem at present to prosper in wickedness, yet that no shades can hide their crimes from his all-seeing eye,

and

and that no arts can screen their guilt from his all-powerful hand: for assuredly the Lord seeth, and as assuredly the God of Jacob will regard and punish it.

SERMON LIII.

ON CHRISTMAS-DAY.

PSALM xcviii.

O sing unto the Lord a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: with his own right hand and with his holy arm hath he gotten himself the victory. The Lord declared his salvation; his righteousness hath he openly shewed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered his mercy and truth toward the house of Israel, and all the ends of the world have seen the salvation of our God. Shew yourselves joyful unto the Lord, all ye lands; sing, rejoice, and give thanks. Praise the Lord upon the harp, sing to the harp with a psalm of thanksgiving. With trumpets also and shawms, O shew yourselves joyful before the Lord the King. Let the sea make a noise, and all that therein

therein is; the round world, and they that dwell therein. Let the floods clap their hands, and let the hills be joyful together before the Lord; for he is come to judge the earth: With righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity.

THIS psalm seems to have been composed upon occasion of some great deliverance which God had granted to Israel: but, like many others, it is not confined to that alone, but has also a secondary view to the coming of the Messiah. The Psalmist considers that deliverance which his brethren had lately received as an earnest of a still greater deliverance; and whilst he celebrates the victory and triumphs of his own nation, proclaims also that salvation of God, which was to extend itself to all the ends of the world.

Fired, therefore, with the distant prospect of so great a blessing, he could not contain his joy, but breaks out into raptures of exultation, and calls not only upon man, but upon all creatures, to join with him in praising God for his mercies.

In the three first verses, he sets forth the cause, extent, and motive of that redemption which

which the Son of God has brought to the world.

In the five following verses, he summons the whole circle of created nature to be joyful and thankful for so great a blessing.

And in the last verse, he assures us, that the Lord is at the door, and coming to fill the world with righteousness, and judge the people with equity.

"The Lord," says he, "hath done marvel-"lous things." And marvellous indeed are all the works of God: for he created all things out of nothing: he spake, and they were made; he commanded, and they stood fast. But in this, the work of our Redemption, there was still a greater degree of wonder, which angels themselves were not able to conceive:—The Son of God, equal to the Father, was made man, in all things like unto us, sin only excepted: the everlasting God vouchsafed to be born of a woman, and the King of glory to be laid in a manger: the Lord of all things took upon himself the form of a servant, and the Creator of the world died between two thieves: righteousness was made a sin, and blessing a curse: the love of the Father drank of the cup of his anger, and

the Prince of life died, and was buried in the grave of mortality. Well, therefore, might the Psalmist say, that "the Lord hath done marvellous things."

And in the next verse, he shews us by what power they were done:—"With his own right "hand," says he, "and with his holy arm, "hath he gotten himself the victory." Not indeed that God is ever in danger: for his majesty is too high to stand in need of deliverance. But the victory he gained is our's: to redeem us, he put himself in our place, and entered the lists against those bitter enemies of our salvation, the world, the flesh, and the devil. It is the triumph, therefore, over these, which the Psalmist calls upon us to remember: and indeed just reason have we to remember it, if we consider how much it cost even the Son of God himself to accomplish it. It was this, which called forth that blood which he sweat in the garden: it was this, which drew from him that sorrowful cry which he uttered in his agony, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from "me:" it was this which extorted that bitter exclamation on the cross, "My God, my God, "why hast thou forsaken me!"—And who but himself was able to accomplish a victory over such enemies? Who, but himself was able to subdue

subdue the powers of darkness, to appease the wrath of heaven, to satisfy the offended justice of Omnipotence, to expiate the sins of a lost world, to conquer death, and to procure life and immortality? Not saints nor angels, not all the united powers of heaven and earth could do this: what they, therefore, were unable to do, he accomplished by his own might:—"With his own right hand and with his holy "arm he got himself the victory."

And this victory over sin and death is what he calls, in the following verse, righteousness and salvation:—"The Lord declared his salva-"tion, his righteousness hath he openly "shewed." Thus in the same manner God expresses himself in Isaiah; "My righteousness "is near, my salvation is gone forth." And again, "My righteousness shall be for ever, "and my salvation from generation to genera-"tion." And in another place; "My salva-"tion is near to come, and my righteousness "to be revealed." And in many other places of scripture, the righteousness of God signifies salvation, or that deliverance which he gives us out of his free mercy.

After declaring the nature of this victory, or salvation, the Psalmist next proceeds to acquaint

us with the extent of it:—"He hath remem-
"bered his mercy and truth toward the house
"of Israel, and all the ends of the world have
"seen the salvation of our God."—"He hath
"remembered his mercy and truth toward the
"house of Israel."—Doth God then ever forget to be gracious? or doth he not always remember the promises which he made to a thousand generations? Far be it from the Almighty thus to deal with his creatures: we are fluctuating and unstable; but God is the rock of ages; in whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning: he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. But he is said to remember his mercy and truth toward the house of Israel, because he now performed what he long before promised in due time should come to pass: for God hath given mankind hopes of this great salvation, even from the beginning of the world: and he afterwards particularly renewed the promise of it to Abraham and Jacob, and to their posterity from time to time, which is here called the House of Israel. And from thence he is said in another place, "to remember his holy co-
"venant, and the oath which he sware unto
"our father Abraham." And from hence it was, that the Jews had a prior claim to all the world in the interests of the Saviour, who was born as on this day: for though redemption by Christ

Christ be common to all nations, yet salvation was peculiarly of the Jews. Christ was to be born of their stock, and of Jewish parents; which therefore made Simeon justly call him, "A light to lighten the Gentiles, but the glory "of the people of Israel." For the same reason the Gospel was preached first to the Jews, and not to the Gentiles till after they had refused it. And agreeably to this, St. Paul stiles our Saviour Truth in respect of the Jews, and Mercy in respect of the Gentiles; because to the one he was directly promised, but not to the other. And this is what the Psalmist also here expresses, "He hath remembered his mercy and "truth toward the house of Israel."

But, blessed be God, the knowledge of salvation is now no longer confined to the Jews: the partition wall is broken down, and all the ends of the world have seen the salvation of God. Nay, so much is the face of things changed, that we, who were once sinners of the Gentiles, enjoy the bright sunshine of heavenly truth, whilst his once favourite people are shut up in wilful and gross darkness. Let their fate, therefore, be a warning to ourselves; and whilst with pity we look down upon their forlorn and desperate condition, let us take care not to pro-

voke God by our sinful ingratitude to reduce us to the same state of blindness and infidelity.

So sensible was the Psalmist of the gratitude we owe to God for the work of our redemption, that, in the following verses, he calls upon all creatures to rejoice and praise his name for so inestimable a blessing. He first addresses himself to men:—"Shew yourselves joyful unto the "Lord, all ye lands; sing, rejoice, and give "thanks. Praise the Lord upon the harp; "sing to the Lord with a psalm of thanks-"giving. With trumpets also and shawms, O "shew yourselves joyful before the Lord the "King."

And surely, if we rightly consider, we cannot want much exhortation to join in this language of triumph. The very thought that the great God of heaven condescends to be mindful of us, is enough to dry up our tears and comfort our hearts: but when we farther consider, that out of his exceeding great love towards us, he condescended to take our nature upon him, and to visit us, as at this time, in great humility; that he submitted to poverty, shame, and reproach; and at length died upon the cross, to save us from eternal death, and procure for us everlasting life; this cannot but fill our hearts with joy,

and

and our tongues with praises. This is such an inexpressible blessing of God that the Psalmist thought all the voices of all the men that ever lived upon the earth insufficient to declare it, and therefore he farther calls upon all creatures, things animate and inanimate, to join in the general chorus of exultation:—"Let the sea "make a noise," says he, "and all that therein "is; the round world, and they that dwell "therein. Let the floods clap their hands, and "let the hills be joyful together before the "Lord." The meaning of which is, That as the inanimate things here mentioned have a share in our deliverance, so, if they were endued with sense and voice, as we are, they would testify their joy by some outward signs and demonstrations. For sin has so debased the works of nature, and made such havock in the world, that even inanimate things feel the sad effects of it; which made St. Paul say, "The creature "itself was made subject to vanity;" and "that by reason of sin the whole creation "groaneth and travaileth together in pain." But through the redemption of Jesus Christ, sin is destroyed, and the creatures re-instated in their former dignity; because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God; therefore, if they had any knowledge of

what passed in the world before the coming of our Saviour, as they would be sensibly affected with grief for the sad effects of sin, so now they would testify their joy, if they, like us, could see what wonderful works the Son of God hath wrought for us. For this reason, therefore, it is, that the Psalmist calls upon them all to be joyful before the Lord.

And to strengthen the cause of this universal joy, he farther adds, "For he is come to "judge the earth: with righteousness shall he "judge the world, and the people with equity." The scripture says, "The Lord comes," as often as he manifests his presence in any place, either by some remarkable effect of his goodness, or by some visible symbol of his majesty: but here by his coming is properly meant that great and remarkable display of his mercy, when he really came in person; when he took our nature upon him, and came into the world by that miraculous birth, which we this day commemorate. It is not therefore a prophet, or an angel, or a seraph, or the highest of the heavenly host, that cometh to judge the world, but the only begotten Son of the Father:—it is that Jesus who was foretold by the prophets; who was born of a virgin; whom the wise men of the east, directed by a star, came to worship; whom Herod persecuted;

persecuted; who preached the glad tidings of salvation to all the world:—it is the true Emmanuel, God and man in one person, who condescends to take our nature upon him, and to dwell among us.

And that judgment which the prophetic Psalmist ascribes to him, is that royal authority which he exercises, as well over his church, which is his proper dominion, as over all the rest of the world. His kingdom indeed here is but yet in its infancy, and its progress upon earth is retarded by the malice of devils and wicked men; there are yet many dark corners of the world where his blessed name is unknown, and his authority unacknowledged; but the day will come, in God's good time, when his glorious kingdom shall be enlarged; when Jews and Gentiles will join in giving him the honour due unto his name; when all people shall fall down before him, and all nations do him service; when we shall all be one fold, under one shepherd, Jesus Christ.

This, then, is what the Psalmist saw and foretold concerning the coming of Christ. And what he foretold, we have actually seen fulfilled and accomplished. The Messenger of the covenant, the Redeemer of mankind, is come, and hath

hath judged the world with righteousness, and the people with equity. He has encountered our enemies, he has delivered us from the bondage of sin, he has restored to us the lost image of God, and made us heirs of eternal salvation. If therefore the Psalmist rejoiced to see his day, and was glad; if the distant prospect of so great a blessing filled his breast with the most lively gratitude; what ought our joy and gratitude to be, who have not only seen, but actually enjoy, what he beheld obscurely and afar off? If a small emanation of heavenly light could kindle such divine raptures of love in his affections, what ought we to feel, who have seen the Sun of righteousness rising in his strength, and filling the world with his heavenly effulgence? If the sea, the floods, and the hills, and all inanimate nature, are called upon to pay their tribute of praise, what praise and adoration are due from us, to whom the Lord hath given so great salvation? or what excuse shall we plead, if we neglect to do it? They indeed have no power to express their homage to the God of nature but by silent obedience to his commands; for there is neither speech nor language heard among them: but God hath given us an understanding and a tongue; the one, to conceive the wonders of his providence, and the other, to set forth his praises: we are therefore inexcusable, if we do

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not employ those faculties he has given us in extolling his goodness, and declaring his love towards the children of men.

These are duties indeed incumbent upon us at all times: but they are more especially so at this solemn season, when we are assembled to celebrate the miraculous birth of our dear Redeemer, and at the same time to commemorate his painful death in the holy mysteries of the Sacrament. And the more to encourage us in the discharge of these holy duties, he has promised that he will be in the midst of us, where two or three are gathered together in his name, and that he will dwell in those who devoutly eat his flesh and drink his blood. We may therefore truly say with the Psalmist, "The Lord is "come indeed:" He now looks down from heaven on this his house of prayer, and will honour our solemnity with his presence: He regards the supplications of his people, and will hear their cry: He seeth the silent breathings of the contrite heart, and listens to the penitential murmurs of the returning sinner.

Are then the eyes of our Redeemer thus over us? let him not find us sleeping, but let us be sober, and watch unto prayer. Is he now at the door, and expects us to meet him at his holy

table, and to be partakers of the marriage feast? let us prepare to meet him, by putting on the wedding garment required of God in the Gospel, by resolving to forsake our past sins, to amend our lives, and be in perfect charity with all men; so shall we be meet partakers of his holy mysteries, and intitled to that salvation which he came to purchase for us: for he came to save repenting sinners.

And when we return from these holy ordinances, let it be our fixed resolution to go and sin no more, lest some worse thing befal us, than we have yet experienced. Let us renounce the hidden works of darkness, and put on the armour of light; knowing that Christ calls us to sublimer delights and more exalted joys than the world can give.

And, lastly, whilst our hearts are filled with his love, and our mouths with his praises, let us lay aside all hatred, quarrels, and animosities, all malice, strife, and envy, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us.

SERMON LIV.

PHILIP. ii. 8, 9.

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.

IN the beginniug of this chapter, the Apostle exhorts the Philippians to the discharge of two very necessary duties, unity and humility. In the first and second verses, he requests them to maintain peace and concord among themselves; lest being divided and rent asunder by intestine contentions, they should expose themselves to the insidious frauds of false apostles and teachers.—"If there be any consolation in "Christ," says he, "if any comfort of love, if "any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and "mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded,

" minded, having the same love, being of one " accord, of one mind." He then proceeds to recommend to them the duty of humility, by setting before them the example of Christ, who, being God, emptied and debased himself by taking our nature upon him, " and being found " in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and " became obedient unto death, even the death " of the cross." In return for which he tells us, " God hath highly exalted him, and given " him a name, which is above every name; " that at the name of Jesus every knee should " bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, " and things under the earth; and that every " tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is " Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

These words then obviously lead us to the consideration, first, of our Saviour's humiliation, and, secondly, of his exaltation.

In his humiliation, the two most considerable circumstances are, first, that he, being God, was found in fashion as a man; and, secondly, that he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.—" He was found in fashion as a " man:"—he was subject to all the infirmities of frail and mortal nature, sin only excepted. He hungered, he thirsted, he shed tears, his soul

soul was exceedingly sorrowful, he felt bitter agonies, he sweat drops of blood a little before his death. Was not this indeed to humble himself? Could there be greater humility than for God to become man, and to be born of a woman; for the Creator to become a creature; for Him that was the maker of all things to be himself made on the earth? This is surely such humility as cannot be paralleled! This is such a mystery as cannot sufficiently be admired! "I will no longer wonder," said one, "at the "frame of the world, or the course of the sun "and moon, though these are most wonderful: "but I will wonder that the Lord should de- "scend into the womb of a virgin, and the "Omnipotent should cry in a cradle." Let then this great mystery fill our hearts with wonder, and our tongues with praise. Let us join in the grateful exultation of the holy virgin; "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spi- "rit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." And, whilst our mouths are filled with his praises, let our hearts also be filled with his virtues. Let us learn of Christ, who was thus meek and lowly. He debased himself for us, though he was a God; then let not us, who are sinful dust and ashes, exalt ourselves above our brethren. Let us not think more highly of ourselves than we

ought

ought to think, but think soberly; in lowliness of mind esteeming others better than ourselves.

And, lastly, since Christ was in all things made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining unto God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people; let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. For Christ, having borne our griefs, and been partakers of our infirmities, knows how to pity us; he knows whereof we are made, and remembers that we are but dust; having suffered himself, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

But, secondly, Christ not only thus humbled himself in life by becoming man, but he also farther humbled himself by dying for us, by becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross.—And surely this was the greatest act of humility and condescension since the foundation of the world! He humbled himself to exalt us; he was obedient to death for our disobedience: he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, he was debased for our pride. And in this marvellous act the wisdom and justice of God were equally manifest: the

the just is reputed unjust, that the unjust might be made just: the innocent is condemned, that the condemned might become innocent: the conqueror is in bonds to unloose the captive: the physician takes the bitter potion to cure the patient: the judge is executed to save the criminal.

Thus the Beloved of his Father drank of the dregs of the phials of wrath for our sakes: the Bread of Life hungered for our gluttony: the Fountain of Grace thirsted for our intemperance: the Word of God became dumb for our crying sins: innocence was condemned for our guilt: the King of Glory endured shame for our shameful lives: the Lord of Life was put to death for our heinous and deadly offences.—And yet, whilst the rocks rent at his passion, the sun withdrew his beams, the heavens mourned, and the earth shook, man only remained unmoved and insensible, for whose sake he suffered all these things.

But let not us be like the stubborn and unrelenting Jews of old. Reflect on thy sins, O guilty offender, and be filled with sorrow and remorse for them. It was these that caused all his bitter and excruciating torments. Without these, neither could Judas have betrayed him,

nor the high priests accused him; neither could the people have mocked, nor Pilate have condemned him. These were the thorns, the whips, the spear and nails that pierced and wounded his soul. And shall Christ smart for thy sins, and wilt not thou be sorry for them thyself? Wilt thou by impenitence reject the offers of his mercy? Wilt thou refuse to accept his kindness, when breathless he looks down from the cross, and bids thee live? Canst thou forbear to melt, when thou seest the redemption of thy sins thus dearly bought with his wounds, and streaming with his blood?—If thou wilt not feel for these things, the very rocks which rent, and the graves which opened at his crucifixion, shall one day rise up in judgment against thee, and condemn thy hardened and impenitent heart.

Let us farther be thankful to God for this inestimable blessing. Christ has shewn, we see, the greatest love that can be in dying for us: for greater love can no man shew than to lay down his life for his friend: but Christ had greater love than this, for he laid down his life for his enemies. Therefore should every one that looks for an interest in this great blessing, say with holy David, "Praise thou the Lord, "O my soul, and all that is within me praise "his holy name! Praise the Lord, O my soul, "and

" and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth
" all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy dis-
" eases, who redeemeth thy life from destruc-
" tion, who crowneth thee with loving kindness
" and tender mercies."

Lastly, Whilst we are sorry that our sins were the cause of our Redeemer's sufferings, let us also rejoice that his sufferings were the cause of our salvation. Hence we obtained the victory over Satan, death, and hell: hence we have rendered to God full satisfaction for our past guilt: hence we have an interest in the blessing of eternal life. This is what St. Paul means when he tells us, that Christ became poor, that we might be rich:—He was disgraced, that we might be honoured: he wore a crown of thorns, that we might have a crown of glory: he was forsaken of God, that we might never be forsaken by him: in a word, he was numbered with thieves and transgressors, that we might be numbered with saints and angels in glory hereafter. Let this then be a rich cordial to support our drooping spirits against the pains of life and the terrors of death. For since Christ has paid the ransom for us by his death, who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? Heaven will not, and hell cannot; cheerfully, therefore, let us run the race that is set before us, looking

unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

This leads me to consider, secondly, the exaltation of Christ: "Wherefore also God hath "highly exalted him:"—has advanced him to the highest dignity: has exalted him above the grave in his resurrection, above the earth in his ascension, and above the heavens in seating him at his own right hand: has exalted him above all power; has given him a name above every other name; that at the sacred name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; that men and angels, the living and the dead, should acknowledge his majesty; and that every tongue, men of all nations and languages, should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, and cry with the elders that surround the throne of God, "Worthy is "the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and "riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, "and glory."

If then Christ, who humbled and abased himself so low, be thus highly exalted, let me exhort you in the words of the Apostle, to "humble "your-

" yourselves under the mighty hand of God,
" that he may exalt you in due time." Submit yourselves one to another: let your best ornament be that of a meek and lowly heart: there is no virtue in the sight of God of greater price, there is none drawn in more amiable colours.—
" I dwell in the high and holy place," says God himself, " with him also that is of a contrite
" and humble spirit." And He who thus humbled himself for us men and our salvation, has expressly told us, that " blessed are the poor in
" spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Secondly, If Christ, who humbled himself thus low, was again exalted by the mighty hand of God, above all principalities and powers, there is no cause why any of God's children, how low soever they are brought, should despair of rising again. Look up to Him who hanged for thee upon the cross, thou afflicted mourner, and learn patience. Art thou spoiled of thy goods? Thy Saviour had not where to lay his head. Art thou falsely accused? Thy Redeemer was arraigned and condemned as a malefactor and blasphemer. Art thou visited with pain and disease? Thy God was wounded with whips and thorns. Dost thou sigh for thy grievous afflictions? He was compelled to cry out, " My
" God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!"

Is there wormwood in thy cup? There was gall in his. Hast thou things laid to thy charge which thou never knewest? He was accused by false witnesses, who laid to his charge things that he knew not. Art thou despised and ridiculed? He was set at nought, spit upon, buffeted; yea, he was pressed down to the earth with many sorrows.—And yet he now sitteth at the right hand of God; "for the suffering of "death being crowned with glory and honour."

Since then God will one day raise the poor from the dunghill to set him in the throne of princes, since he will cast the bright beams of his favour upon men of the lowest degree; why should any of his children be driven by their distresses to resign their portion in his promises, and to shut up their eyes in despair? Though they lie in the dust, like holy Job; though they are captives in the dungeon, like Jeremiah; though they are cast down to the deep below, like Jonas; yet let them remember that they are not out of the reach of Providence. God has an outstretched arm, and is mighty to save. There is no place so high, which he cannot reach, to pull down the proud: there is no depth so low, which he cannot fathom, to draw up the humble and afflicted.

Lastly,

Lastly, Whilst we derive comfort and refreshment in the multitude of our sorrows from the name of Christ, let this teach us to reverence and adore this holy name with the profoundest veneration and humility. Let us renounce and abhor that levity and inconsiderateness, that rashness and impudence, with which the name of Jesus is too often impiously profaned and blasphemed. Let us never name it without the deepest sense of his love and our own unworthiness. And may all who bear this sacred name live agreeably to their holy profession, and walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called! And to those who yet sit in darkness and the shadow of death, who have never heard of thy name, look down, O merciful Saviour, with compassion from thy throne. Display thy healing light over the world. Recall the scattered tribes of Judah, thou great Messiah, and open the eyes of turks, infidels, and heretics, who now oppose thy power: that all nations may fall down before thee, and all people do thee service; that thy holy name may every where be glorified, and thy blessed kingdom enlarged; and that all mankind may follow the blessed example of thy great humility, and become one fold under one shepherd.

SERMON LV.

ON ASH-WEDNESDAY.

AMOS iii. 6.

Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?

IN the beginning of this chapter, the prophet Amos, with great solemnity, summons all the tribes of Israel to hear the sentence of wrath and indignation, which the Lord God of Israel had pronounced against them. And, because he was willing before-hand to give them a right apprehension of God's justice in inflicting the evils they were going to suffer, he reminds them, in the second verse, of the many and signal favours they had received, when the Almighty chose them for himself as a peculiar people, and for a long series of ages guided and protected them by a wonderful theocracy, unknown to other lands, and justly the admiration of all succeeding times: the just and natural effect

effect of which should have been, that they should have exceeded all others as much in virtue and obedience, as they exceeded them in outward privileges and advantages. But that this was so far from being the case, that they were even become more wicked than the nations round about them, and were therefore justly obnoxious to the vengeance of God, in whose sight ingratitude is a crime of the blackest and deepest dye:—"You only," says he, "have I "known of all the families of the earth; there- "fore will I punish you for all your iniquities."

And lest they should vainly imagine, that the judgments which were coming upon them were the effects of blind chance or irresistible destiny; that their afflictions came forth of the dust, or their troubles sprang out of the ground; he proceeds to tell them, in the words of the text, that they are the effects of his power and good pleasure, without whose command no evil could happen to them:—"Can there be evil," says he, "in a city, and the Lord hath not "done it?" No: not even so much as a hair of the head falleth without his knowledge; much less, therefore, can great national calamities happen without his direction: and therefore let all mankind be well assured of this great and important truth, that whenever any public and general

neral desolation spreads itself through a city or kingdom, I the Lord have sent it upon them, for their punishment and reformation: their punishment, in respect of what is past; and their reformation for the future.

This great truth then, that there cannot be any evil in a city, which the Lord hath not done, being established by the testimony of God himself, it naturally follows, that the best and wisest way any people can use to prevent impending calamity, is, to engage the Lord on their side, by removing the general evil of sin, which never fails, sooner or later, to call down the just vengeance of heaven on cities and kingdoms. This is an observation never improper to be spoken to; but now, I think, more especially agreeable to the present circumstances of things amongst ourselves. For we now seem to stand in need of the voice of a prophet to warn us, that there are many evils hanging over our heads, and that therefore it is high time to humble ourselves under the hand of God; sincerely confessing, heartily bewailing, and instantly renouncing those many national abominations, which threaten ruin and desolation on every side. I should therefore be highly inattentive to the solemn purpose for which I stand here at this season of humiliation and devotion,

votion, if I did not endeavour to excite you to the discharge of these penitential duties, by setting before you a faithful picture of the state of religion and morality amongst us; which, though not applicable, I trust, to many, yet clearly concerns us all as members of the same community, and therefore, though not strictly liable to fall as individuals from our own sins, yet, like the companions of Jonah in antient times, in danger of sharing one common ruin from the grievous and crying sins of others, who are embarked in the same bottom with us.

Grievous and crying sins I call them: since they are such as are not only offences against the positive law of God, but also strike at the very vitals of all religion, morality, decency, and good order, in the world. How many thousands are there, who daily employ their tongues, or pens, or both perhaps, in scoffing at religion, and in patronizing and defending the most barefaced infidelity? The common principles of morality are no less flagrantly discarded: truth and honesty are laughed at as mere fancies and chimeras; the laws of good and evil are almost extinguished, and in their room, vice is digested into a regular and professed system. Folly and debauchery, indecency in word and action, are all comprized and coun-

countenanced under the idea of wit and good company.

The most lewd and lascivious practices too, the most abandoned violation of conjugal chastity, in both sexes, have, and do, in a more particular manner, disgrace the present age; even beyond the example of that profligate æra, when the monarch on the throne, after having basely tarnished his own honour by becoming the pensioner of France, corrupted the morals of his people, by introducing every species of Gallic frivolity and debauchery among them. Again; intemperance and luxury, the most boundless and extravagant pride, the most daring profanation of the name of God and his sabbaths, and the most open disregard to truth, may be said to have erected their thrones among us. The methods of defrauding, cheating, and harrassing, sometimes in evasion of the law, and sometimes under its sanction, are become so subtle and refined, that even the wisest of our senators are unable to find adequate remedies for them; and it may justly be remarked, that the multiplication of our penal laws, beyond the example of any other age or nation in the world, alone demonstrates the height of corruption to which we are arrived.

But

But what can be said more to enhance the guilt of the inhabitants of this land, than that they have sinned and rebelled against God, after they have been, like the Jews of old, nourished and brought up by him? Was not the goodness of God displayed in a singular manner amongst us, at the time of the Reformation, when we were snatched like a fire-brand out of the Romish fiery furnace, by a child and a woman, I mean by King Edward the Sixth and his successor in promoting the Reformation, Queen Elizabeth? And how often, since that time, have we escaped the bloody zeal of Rome? How often have we been rescued from their hellish plots and contrivances? So that when we consider the variety of mercies which have been conferred upon us, we must be void of all sense, as well as gratitude, if we do not laud and magnify the divine bounty.

Again; God hath placed us in a fruitful land, abounding with the choicest temporal blessings, whether we respect necessity or delight. And we have also blessings of a still higher nature, such as belong to our souls and immortal spirits, such as relate to our happiness in a better world, when all the quarrels and jarring interests of this shall be at an end.—In short, we have all things, but thankful hearts and grateful lives.

For,

For, instead of growing better for our advantages, we exactly verify what was said of old, "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked." Such is our practice: we spurn against our Benefactor, our Preserver, our Deliverer. We have been sharers in extraordinary mercies, but there is no sign or trace of it in our behaviour. We talk as atheistically, we swear as loudly, we game as profusely, and in every thing we behave as irreligiously, as if we had never experienced the bounty of heaven or been shielded by the protecting arm of Providence.

Once more: Judgments have been blended with mercies, and yet we continue to sin, under and against both. God hath been pleased to try us in all ways: we have had experience of all the methods and dispensations of his Providence, of health and sickness, plenty and scarcity, peace and war, order and disorder, deliverance and distress. I might remind you, that besides the dreadful visitations of fire and pestilence, which this country has often in former times experienced, we have also had the shaking of the earth under our feet, and the contending elements spreading desolation over our heads, and involving thousands in ruin.

And

And yet, though these have been the wrathful indications of an offended God, where is the person that considers his ways, alters his course of life, and becomes a sincere proselyte of religion? Are our national sins at all diminished? Are our churches at all fuller? Is not rather the reverse a notorious and melancholy truth? Is again the mis-spending of the Lord's day, that fatal source of ruin and corruption, duly discouraged and corrected? Are blasphemous oaths seldomer heard in the day, or do our streets less resound with nocturnal revels? Are our places of public resort less numerous, less expensive, or less frequented? Do not the eternal disputes and extravagant stipends of our various theatrical performers, whether native or imported, throw an indelible disgrace upon the sense of the nation, which encourages, protects, and supports at so enormous an expence, a race of often abandoned, and always useless triflers, and even entombs them when dead with more than royal pomp, amidst the hallowed shrines of prelates, statesmen, heroes, and kings.

And surely, when things are come to this pass, that God's judgments prove ineffectual, yea, rather that they harden us in our wicked practices, we may justly conclude, that sin is arrived

arrived at its full growth, and consequently is but too nearly ripe for destruction.

Again: Shamefacedness and modesty are restraints, which even nature herself hath stamped upon the minds of all men, and where these remain, there is some hope of reclaiming offenders. But, where sin is bold and daring, where it lifts up its voice on high, and looks defiance, the case is desperate indeed. Apply then this observation to ourselves. Will it not make one tremble, to see how men proclaim their sin as Sodom, are ambitious, as it were, to be seen, bring their villanies on the stage, act them publicly, and even challenge applause? Many sins are so far from being a reproach, that they are even thought creditable and honourable; especially in what relates to the commerce of the two sexes, and what is usually called by the gentle name of gallantry, which fatally gilds over what, in times of less refinement, were thought great and crying sins, for which the land mourned.

Nor again are modesty and shamefacedness less out of fashion, even with many of that sex, which always should be, and once was, the most eminent for them. Education and good-breeding were formerly designed to make young per-

sons decent and circumspect in their deportment, attentive to all persons, and respectful to those of superior age or rank. But it is either the design, or at least the consequence, of what is now called good-breeding, to make them pert, bold, and forward; to be able to put others out of countenance, without being so themselves. Need I say, that all our public places bear a melancholy testimony to this truth? Do not the young, giddy flutterers of both sexes who fill them, disgust every person of decency and common sense, by their forward and assuming behaviour, by their noisy and flippant conversation, by their loud and unmeaning laughs, by their derision of every thing manly and serious, and by a total want of respect to age, one of the surest marks of a foolish head, or a wicked heart. And this, I think, may be generally observed, both as to young and old, that though vice has been practised in all ages, yet it never was practised with that confidence which has been seen of late.

Again: we are not only guilty of many great and enormous sins, and that too with an unblushing assurance; but many also are so ambitious of being enrolled in the number of sinners, that they will even boast of more wickedness than ever they acted, will tell of seductions

or

or intrigues, which existed no where but in their own diabolical inventions, to throw a slur upon unsuspecting innocence and unsullied virtue, and, at the same time, to shew the world, that they want not the inclination to commit such things, and esteem it an honour to be thought perfect and thorough-paced in all the ways of iniquity.

Once more: this traffic in vice extends to persons of all states and degrees, of all denominations and persuasions. I except not even our own order; though we are bound, by every tie of conscience, religion, and law, to set an example of regular and religious deportment to those committed to our care. I neither wish to speak evil of dignities, nor to become an accuser of the brethren: but really, when I contrast the learning, sanctity, decency, gravity, and piety of the antient ecclesiastics of this land, with the levity, ignorance, idleness, and irreligiousness of those reverend harlequins in motley habits, who miscall themselves divines; when I weigh the solid, learned, and edifying discourses of the former, with the frothy, puerile, and illiterate rant of those modern declaimers, who catch at the applause of the admiring multitude, I cannot but conclude, that either the primitive teachers of the word of God bestowed much unnecessary labour on their ministry, or,

that we fall much short of our duty, of what ought justly to be expected from us, and of what we solemnly promised at the time of our ordination. And should this be the case, as I too much fear it is, will it not much become the priests, the ministers of the Lord, to weep between the porch and the altar, and to say, "Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thy "heritage to reproach, that the heathen should "rule over them?"

And if we turn our eyes from hence to our nobles, legislators, lawyers, physicians, and others, who stand first in the ranks of life and learning, I need only appeal to the knowledge and testimony of every one, who knows their modes of living, whether there is not a total neglect and disregard even of the outward face of religion, amongst the greater part of them, and that to so glaring and shameful a degree, that it would be difficult to find even a few examples among them of those, who either frequent any place of divine worship themselves, or keep up even the smallest sense or appearance of religion in their families at home. Should any say, that many of them are men of good moral characters; I answer, so were many of the idolaters of learned Athens, warlike Rome, and rigid Sparta. But, if Christianity be not a fable,

much

much more than mere heathen morality is required; and if it be a fable, why should they, in their legislative capacity, by laws and penalties, enforce upon others the observation of Christian duties; what they neither believe nor practise themselves?

Still farther: audaciousness in sinning is not confined to particular scenes and places, but all places are infected; which was not the case in antient times. Formerly, whilst cities and great towns were noted for their disorders, and numbers bade defiance to legal control, the more retired and less populous parts were generally innocent and harmless. But it is just wonder and amazement to see, how even these are changed of late, and over-run with atrocious sin and daring villany. Intemperance and lasciviousness have expelled their native sobriety and chastity: their antient humility too is turned into pride and arrogance, as if they imagined they were, like the antient peasants of Italy, qualified to be called from the spade and the plough to the dictatorship. And indeed this is less to be wondered at in the vicinity of the metropolis, where political phrenzy has seized all orders, and men, whom birth, nature, and education have fitted for shop-boards and counters, start forth self-created legislators, dictate rules

of government to enthroned majesty, explain laws to ermined judges, teach the gospel to learned prelates, and allow no constitution to be valid in church or state, but what originates from nocturnal assemblies, and midnight excess.

Again; our village inhabitants once valued themselves upon their integrity, fair-dealing, and harmlessness: but truly it is now hard to say, whether even the capital itself exceeds the neighbouring villages in artful frauds, in frequent robberies, or in the most daring invasion of property. There was a time too, when the brutal carman or savage porter of the metropolis stood unrivalled in all the terms of profane cursing and swearing, rudeness and obscenity; but they are now even equalled by the village swain, who, if no other object comes in his way, will vent his profane curses upon his beasts and cattle, as if they were as capable of damnation as himself.

I say not all this with a view of disparaging any particular persons among us. I intend not a libel against either the city or the country; in both of which, I am not ignorant that there are many persons of singular honour and integrity, and who are shining examples of virtue and religion. But upon this occasion, when I am called upon to deal freely with you, I think it my

my duty to speak my undisguised and unprejudiced sentiments of the state of things amongst us; not from the splenetic views of a gloomy temper or disappointed ambition; not from the selfish aims of interest, or the partial considerations of faction, pique, or prejudice; but from a sincere and zealous desire of making men better and wiser, and of averting those heavy judgments of God, which we have already in part felt, and which we may still fear to feel in a much greater degree, if we do not amend our ways, and turn unto the Lord our God.

I trust therefore and hope, that every one who hears me this day; who remembers that it is the duty of every minister of the gospel to be at all times instant in season and out of season; to reprove and rebuke, as well as exhort with all authority; will be so far from being offended with this plainness of speech, that he will rather consider it as an earnest call to him seriously to examine his own life, and whenever he shall find himself to have offended in any of the vices I have named, there to bewail his sin to Almighty God, with full purpose and amendment of life.

But whether he will hear, or whether he will forbear, no considerations shall restrain me from discharging what I think to be a just and neces-

sary part of my duty. For though, like St. Peter of old, I may toil all night, and catch nothing, yet at thy word, O blessed God, I will still continue to let down the net! ever mindful of that solemn command, "Thou that bringest good "tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it "up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Ju-"dah, Behold your God!"

I call upon you, therefore, once more in the name of God, I exhort you in the name of Christ, to call your ways to remembrance, to confess your sins to Almighty God, and to resolve for the future to walk in newness and holiness of life.—To you, who are masters and mistresses of families, I would especially address myself, with all earnestness and seriousness of exhortation. Let me adjure you, by every tie of religious and civil duty, to pay a more strict regard to the morals of those committed to your care, both in your own example and in their behaviour. Above all things suffer them not to spend their Sundays abroad in idle dissipation, or in those numerous places of dangerous resort, where the foundation is laid of their sure destruction both in body and soul. You know, you experimentally feel, the truth of what I say, in your children, your apprentices, and your servants. Why then do you not in earnest endea-

vour

vour to apply a remedy to so great and growing an evil? The work of reformation must ever go on slowly, when it rests in few hands. Our ministerial labours are too often despised or ridiculed by the profane and unthinking: but could we speak even with the voice of angels and the tongue of seraphs, our ministerial labours could never alone produce the effect we desire; more especially, when, as is too much the case, too many neither attend our preaching themselves, nor compel or even permit those, who are under their care, to do so. But would you but heartily join your endeavours to ours, would you but send them to hear our instructions, and take care that they are innocently at least, if not piously, employed, when the public business of the Sabbath is over, we should soon see a very different face of things in the world, and you yourselves would reap an immediate advantage from your care and piety. For sure I am, that both in private and in public life, he will always do his duty the best, who fears God, and who does it for conscience sake, not as pleasing men, but God.

I could add much more on this melancholy subject, which a view of the state of things among us suggests, often, and with much sorrow, to my mind, when I compare our lives and practices

tices with those pure and holy precepts of which I am appointed a minister and dispenser. But I have already said enough for this time, and perhaps more than the fastidious ears of some will well bear. I will therefore only add a few words more, and so leave to your serious consideration the melancholy truths I have delivered.

We are assembled here this day to deplore our past sins to Almighty God, and to vow future amendment of our ways, both in word and deed. Let us remember then, that if we do not this in good earnest, and with sincerity of heart, it is only solemn mockery, and will aggravate our offences in the sight of God. Let us remember too, that though we may deceive men, by an outward appearance, by the garb of sorrow, by a sad countenance and uplifted hands, yet we cannot deceive him with whom we have to do: that we are now not only under the roof, but under the eye of the all-seeing God; to whom all things are naked and open, and to whom the darkness is no darkness at all, but the night is as clear as the day. Let us not therefore flatter ourselves with the hope of escaping his notice, or of eluding his vengeance.

But,

But, on the other hand, if we are sincere in doing this work, and cry mightily unto God in prayer, though our backslidings are many, and our transgressions are multiplied, yet he is a gracious and merciful God, to whom belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him.

Let therefore these considerations induce us all to fall down before the footstool of his grace, deprecating his vengeance on our sins, and supplicating his blessings on all our honest and pious labours: that neither iniquity and dissension at home, nor anarchy and confusion abroad, may shake the stability of our empire, or rend the necessary union of its several parts.

And whatsoever prayers thy people shall make here before thee on earth, for these great and valuable blessings, hear thou, O Lord, in heaven, thy dwelling-place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest: for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of the children of men!

SERMON LVI.

2 Tim. iii. 16.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God.

THE great Apostle of the Gentiles, who well knew the tempers and inclinations of mankind, their fondness for novelty, and proneness to change, very clearly foresaw the dangers and inconveniencies to which Christianity would be exposed in all ages, from men of unstable or perverse minds, who should resist the truth, and, being themselves deceived, would endeavour to deceive many. To guard, therefore, his beloved son Timothy against the danger of being led away by false doctrines and erroneous opinions, he exhorts him to continue firm and stedfast in the things he had learned, knowing from whence he had learned them; even from the holy scriptures; which, therefore, he strongly recommends to his constant perusal by the short but noble

noble character contained in the words of the text; "All scripture is given by inspiration of "God."

A truth of the utmost importance to all mankind! For since the sacred writings contain the great charter upon which our hopes of immortality are founded, unless we can be fully assured, that they were given by inspiration of God, we must be left in a state of the most perplexing anxiety and suspence.

It can never, therefore, be unreasonable to shew, that we have the strongest evidence possible of their really being the written will of God; especially, since a full conviction of this, at the same time that it removes all scruple and doubtfulness from our minds, cannot fail of inducing us to practise those virtues, upon which the salvation therein contained is offered to us.

I mean, however, in this short inquiry to confine myself to the scriptures of the New Testament. For since the writings of the Old Testament do not so immediately affect us, and are also closely connected with the history and learning of remote antiquity, it would be neither so suitable nor useful to a popular audience to go about to establish their authenticity. Besides,

sides, if we can clearly evince, that the New Testament was written by the finger of God, it will follow as a necessary consequence, that the Old Testament, which is the basis of the New, was derived from the same almighty Author.

Now the first point of inquiry, which offers itself upon this subject, is; Whether the writers of the New Testament were not themselves deceived and imposed upon, with regard to the several facts and doctrines which they have transmitted down to us?

In answer to this inquiry, it will be sufficient to observe, first, that we have no grounds whatever to suppose that they were so imposed upon, and, secondly, that we have the strongest grounds to believe that they were not. That they were men of clear and sound understandings, their writings themselves abundantly demonstrate; they were not therefore liable to be deluded by any phantasms of a heated or delirious imagination. Nor is it more likely, that they should be deceived any other way; since they were many of them the constant companions of the life and labours of their divine Master, and therefore could not want opportunities of seeing and scrutinizing the facts they relate. Add to this, that the testimony they give is uniform

form and consistent, though derived from very different sources of information; St. Matthew, St. John, and St. Peter having received their information from converse with our Saviour himself, and St. Paul and St. John by an immediate revelation from heaven. So that we may very safely conclude, that the sacred writers were not themselves deceived in the accounts they have delivered to us.

But might they not design to deceive others? I answer, that no man ever formed such a scheme of wickedness without some design of advantage, and some prospect of success.

But, first, what view of advantage, or what temptation could they have? They knew that their doctrine would necessarily expose them to insult and tortures, to pain and death here: they knew too, that the religion they taught condemned lying and fraud; and therefore they could never, even upon their own principles, be entitled to eternal happiness hereafter. They must therefore have been the greatest of madmen, as well as impostors, to have attempted to propagate the tenets of Christianity, if they had not really believed them to be true. And besides all this, what prospect of success could they possibly have? They were mean and illiterate fisher-

fishermen, little versed in the arts of worldly policy; they were to oppose the obstinacy of the Jew and the learning of the Gentile, who were no less able than they would be willing to detect any scheme of imposture, and, what is still more, they had to combat the inveterate wickedness and corruption of both: what prospect therefore could they have of doing this with success, if they had not believed the doctrines they taught, and that therefore the hand of the Lord was sufficient for all these things? And for a decisive argument, that they were not deceivers, I need only to appeal to the plainness and simplicity of their lives, the purity of their doctrines, and the honesty and openness of their writings, in which they even record their own failings and contentions, without any mitigation or disguise; which surely does not look like the art and design with which impostors usually carry on their schemes of fraud and invention. So that we may safely acquit the sacred writers of the charge of being either deceived themselves, or intending to deceive others.

But as infidelity, when driven from one of its strong holds, never wants another to fly to; therefore when no charge of imposture could be fixed upon the Apostles themselves with any tolerable face of probability, it has been pretended,

that they were not the authors of the sacred writings of the New Testament, but that the whole of them was a bold and daring forgery: that some ingenious men might unite their labours to impose upon the world a set of fictitious writings, which the prevailing darkness of gothic ignorance, in the fourth or fifth century, might easily enable them to succeed in. This is a master-stroke of infidelity, so bold, that it has rather been artfully insinuated than openly avowed, even by infidels themselves. But since it was intended to shake the grounds of our holy faith, and unsettle the minds of believers, let us see what foundation it may be supposed to have either in truth or probability.

A set of ingenious men, it is said, might unite their labours to impose a body of spurious doctrines upon the world: no doubt, they might: they might too unite their labours to impose upon us the actions of a Cæsar or the wisdom of a Socrates, the laws of Solon or the code of Justinian: but what evidence is there of their having either done or attempted all this? To believe without grounds of belief is madness itself: therefore till the infidel who dares assert this, can shew, that there is the least ground, either in fact or history, for believing the sacred writings to be such a forgery, he cannot wonder, if

if we rank him among those pitiable objects, whom God has deprived of the light of reason.

Since then there are no grounds, in fact, for supposing such a forgery, let us see whether there be any in probability.

And here I would first remark, that the great variety of stile and manner in the several writings of the New Testament, makes it abundantly evident that they were not all written by the same hand. A man might as well think to reconcile impossibilities, as to suppose that the same person could produce the impetuous thunder and abrupt sublimity of St. Paul, and the gentle simplicity and mildness of St. John. So that, if the New Testament be a forgery, it is not the forgery of one, but of many; which makes such a supposition much more improbable and difficult.

But even if it were possible to suppose, that many should conspire in so ridiculous an undertaking, still they would have had a labour upon their hands, which it would have required more than Herculean strength to accomplish. For since all the ancient fathers are intirely grounded upon the scriptures of the New Testament, they must not only have forged that, but they must

also have forged all their writings; which are so voluminous and numerous, that it would be the laborious business of a long life even to read them with tolerable attention.

Add to this, that they must have been men of uncommon erudition and singular accuracy. For surely in writings, which almost in every page refer to some public and well-known facts or customs of antiquity, it must have required no common talents to have described every thing with such a happy precision, to have kept up so rare a consistency of one part with another, and so nice a coincidence with the collateral relations of profane history, that neither the most exact researches of candid inquiry, nor the most critical investigations of infidel sagacity have been able, through a course of many hundred years, to discover the least slip in time, place, or circumstance.

And after all, what purpose could such a design have answered, either to the world, or to the persons who undertook it? If they meant to make the world worse, they were fools doubly; because the world was then as bad as it well could be, and their doctrines had a tendency to make it better: and if they wished to make it better, they were inconsistent with themselves; since

since they taught, that it was not allowable to do evil that good may come. As to riches, profits, or honours, they could expect none of them, because the success of such an undertaking must wholly depend upon their being for ever unknown. Since then there was neither pleasure nor profit to tempt them to execute such a scheme, they must have done it, we must suppose, out of drollery and humour, with a design to dupe and laugh at mankind. But surely to forge a statute-book, or a hundred volumes of reports and comments, is such Quixotism of humour as never entered even the brain of a modern wit!

I might confirm what has been said upon this subject, by shewing, that we have undoubted evidence, that the Syriac and Latin translations of the New Testament were made in the first century, and that many parts of the New Testament are quoted by the fathers who wrote in the first century; and that the general canon of the New Testament was plainly acknowledged by the council of Nice, at the end of the third century; so that this supposition of a forgery of a later date is utterly impossible. But enough has been already said against so idle a supposition, which scarcely deserved a serious confutation, were not the most trifling pretences magnified

into insuperable objections by daring infidels, who triumph without learning, assert without proof, and condemn without understanding.

If then these sacred books were really composed by the several persons whose names they bear, let us next examine, whether they were the production of human wit, or whether they were given, as the text expresses it, by the inspiration of God.

Now with regard to this point we can have little doubt, if we will give any credit to the writings themselves. For we are there expressly told, that they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, who should teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance. We are there also told, that when they should be called before the tribunals of men, it should be given them in that hour what they should speak: and surely, if they were to be divinely inspired, when they were to defend the cause of God before earthly judges, it is much more reasonable to suppose, that they were divinely inspired, when they were to deliver in writing those great truths, which contained the charter of man's salvation, and were to be the standard of the church in all succeeding ages. And, indeed, without laying any stress upon the claim which these

these sacred writers themselves every where lay to inspiration, even above the prophets of old, we need only, for proof of this point, appeal to the excellence of the doctrines delivered by them, and the full completion of several remarkable prophecies, which clearly and undeniably demonstrate, that they were guided and taught by a Spirit from above.

But it will be asked then, perhaps, if these holy men were thus guided by the Spirit of God, whence arise those differences, which we find in their narrations of several facts? Can the Holy Spirit be inconsistent with itself, or is it, like man's wisdom, fallible and uncertain?

I answer, first, that these differences are only to be found in trivial and inconsiderable circumstances, which no way touch the certainty of the doctrines of Christianity; and therefore are of no weight.

Secondly, that these differences arise from the different views of the several writers; which of course led them to express themselves differently; some relating more fully and at large, what had only been summarily and compendiously delivered by others.

And, thirdly, though we suppose the writers of the New Testament to have been divinely inspired, yet this inspiration was not necessarily extended to the minutiæ of syllables, letters, and circumstances. It is enough that it enabled them to deliver the great truths of the Gospel with certainty and precision, leaving them to the common guidance of their own understanding in matters of an indifferent nature. And, indeed, with ingenuous enquirers, these little variations would rather be an argument in favour of the truth and honesty of the sacred writers; since they shew that there was no collusion or confederacy among them to impose a fictitious tale upon the world, in which they certainly would have taken care to have kept up the most scrupulous agreement.

Nor again will the great variety of readings, which we meet with in the different copies of the sacred books, furnish even a most captious infidel with any just ground of exception to their truth and authenticity. For though we readily allow, that these various readings are very numerous, even more than thirty thousand; yet how can this be any objection to them? Much the greater part of them are in single words of no importance; many in those of small importance; and the rest, though of more consequence,

quence, yet do not either alter or weaken one single mystery or doctrine of our holy religion.

And after all, they are no more than are common to all other ancient books, which in a long course of ages, having passed through the hands of many ignorant or careless transcribers, must of necessity have undergone many alterations. Instead therefore, of wondering at these various readings, we ought rather to bless and adore the guardian providence of God, which has so marvellously preserved this sacred charter of our salvation, that, notwithstanding all the attacks and dangers it has felt, we receive it, I had almost said, in its native purity and lustre.

Thus we see, then, the authenticity of the sacred writings is established upon a clear and solid foundation, which no virulence of scoffers or violence of infidels can shake or subvert. In spite of all opposition, they approve themselves to every candid mind to be given by inspiration of God.

How much then does it become us, to whom they are given, to receive them with attention and reverence! And indeed what is there upon earth that can so well deserve our attention? The world itself, with all its joys and honours

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can at best but give us a momentary happiness; but the scriptures hold forth to us an eternal one. The pains and torments of life are but for an hour: but the pains of that hell, which the scriptures denounce to the sinner, are for ever. The losses we here sustain can only afflict a frail and miserable body: but the loss of an immortal soul is at stake in the concerns of futurity.

Let us then take heed, that we do not neglect so great a salvation. For the clearer are the evidences of holy scripture, the more gracious its promises, the more extensive its privileges, the more noble its doctrines, the greater will be our condemnation, if we do not embrace them,

Whilst then we bless God that we enjoy the bright beams of his Gospel, whilst thousands remain in melancholy ignorance of the way of life, let us take care to make a right use of this inestimable blessing. Let the word of God be our constant guide and companion; let us meditate upon it, when we lie down and when we rise up: let us teach it to our families and children, as the best wisdom, and their securest guard through life.

And

And surely we cannot have a nobler employment than this study of the sacred writings. For, however unfashionable they may be in this age of false refinement and pretended delicacy, I will venture to affirm, that the combined eloquence of Greece and Rome never produced sublimer compositions, considered either with regard to sentiment or language. It is gross ignorance alone that makes men neglect them: for the more they are understood, the more they will ever be admired. And were they studied with that attention they deserve, we should not see that deplorable folly and vacuity of thought, which fills men with vice, by leaving them a prey to every temptation: they would not then be driven to murder their hours of leisure over idle or wicked publications; publications which only serve to fill the minds of individuals with vice, infidelity, or the madness of party-zeal, and the public with tumults, anarchy, and corruption.

Let us then exchange our politics for our Bibles; and instead of pretending to guide the wheels of administration, learn to govern our lives by the laws of the Gospel.

And to this end, let us carefully follow the precepts, and copy the examples, which are therein

therein contained: for in vain will the book of God be in our hands, if its precepts be not also in our hearts.

Thus shall we enjoy the surest support against the changes and chances of this mortal life: thus shall we discharge the duties we owe to those committed to our care: thus shall we be the happy instruments of leading others to God, and shall finally assure to ourselves a glorious place in the kingdom of the just.

SERMON LVII.

2 Tim. iii. 16.

—And is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteosness; that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished for every good work.

HAVING in a former discourse endeavoured to vindicate the authenticity of the sacred writings from the idle cavils of scoffers and infidels, I shall now proceed to shew those various excellencies, by which they recommend themselves to the man of God, and fill the heart of every true believer with reverence and esteem, as being "profitable for doctrine, for "reproof, for correction, for instruction in "righteousness."

And first; The excellence of the scriptures will appear from the matters contained in them, both relating to God and man.

In

In antient times it was the misfortune of the greater part of mankind to be left to their own imaginations in tracing out the existence and nature of a Deity. And hence they were unfortunately led to form the most unworthy notions concerning him; notions better adapted to the corruption of human ignorance, than the perfections of the one all-perfect Jehovah. But in the scriptures we have an uniform and clear account of the being and nature of the great Creator, delivered to us by his own immediate inspiration; we have such full and distinct declarations of his eternal Godhead, of his infinite power and wisdom, his mercy and justice, his truth and goodness, as are sufficient to remove all false conceptions concerning him, to possess our minds with a most awful and religious sense of his divine perfections, and to raise our souls, and all that is within us, to love, praise, and adore his holy name.

Nor are the things contained in scripture of less importance in discovering to us what more immediately relates to ourselves.

The reasonings of men, without the light of revelation, concerning their own first production, their present state and future expectations, were as dark and confused as their speculations about

about God. They discovered, indeed, by woeful experience, that man was in a state of degeneracy and corruption; but whence this proceeded, by what means it might be remedied, or what would be its consequences in another life, it was impossible for them to discover. But these mists of ignorance the light of scripture has dispelled, and acquainted us with every circumstance of our condition, which it concerned us to know. They inform us, that we were raised from the dust of the earth, and inspired with a living and reasonable soul by the Almighty; that man was made of an upright and perfect nature, and that his corruption was occasioned by the wilful disobedience of our first parents, from which our stains and infirmities are all derived; they discover to us the great work of our redemption; the means by which we are restored to the divine favour; by which we are enabled to triumph over sin here, and to obtain an immortal inheritance hereafter.

These are great and important discoveries indeed! discoveries which human understanding could never have reached, nor the severest researches into the works of nature and providence ever have found out. For though in the volume of creation men might have read, that the world was not formed by chance, nor produced from all

all eternity; though the heavens might declare to them the glory of God, and the firmament shew his handy-work; though the beauty and harmony of the universe, the regularity and order in which all things are supported and governed, might display the guidance and beneficence of an all-seeing Providence; yet these could never trace the wisdom and goodness of the almighty Father in planning the great scheme of man's redemption by Jesus Christ; this alone could be brought to light by that divine revelation, from which we know the great love of God towards mankind in every age of the world, from the times of the patriarchs and prophets, till the fulness of time was come, in which he spake more clearly by his Son.

Nor are the scriptures of less importance in clearing up the nature of our present state and future expectations. They declare to us our natural degeneracy and corruption, the wretched fruits of guilt and disobedience: they justly represent to us the folly of our imaginations, the unruliness of our passions, the stubbornness of our wills, the deceitfulness of our hearts; and what is of most importance, they fully assure us of the dangerous tendency of our corrupt inclinations, by pronouncing that "the wages of sin "is death."

And

And as to our future expectations, they not only teach us, that the soul for ever lives after its departure from the body, but that the body itself also shall be raised incorruptible, and both be partakers of everlasting happiness or misery. In order to which, they plainly reveal a judgment to come, in which God shall lay open the secrets of all hearts; in which every one shall give an account of the improvement of those talents they have been entrusted with, and be accordingly rewarded or punished. And they do not only discover to us the different nature of vice and virtue here, and the different states of happiness and misery which await them hereafter, but also acquaint us with the means whereby we may attain the one, and avoid the other. They point out a new and living way, whereby our sins may be pardoned, and we may be restored to the favour of God; even through Him whom he hath appointed to be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world. They inform us, that through him we may draw near unto God with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience: that through his merits and mediation we may not only hope for grace to subdue our sins, to resist temptations, to conquer the world, the flesh, and the devil; but also, that having fought this good fight, and finished our

course by patient continuance in well-doing, we may look for glory, honour, and immortality in the life to come.

What things then can be of greater importance for man to know, or God to reveal, than the nature of God and of ourselves, the state and condition of our souls, the way to avoid misery, and enjoy a state of eternal happiness? These are certainly doctrines of the noblest nature, and are, if any can be so, capable of affording us hope!

We shall farther see the use and comfort of the scriptures, if we consider the manner in which they are delivered to us.

And first, they are delivered plainly, distinctly, and clearly. Not but that there are in them some passages hard to be understood, as being delivered either in a prophetic ſtile, under doubtful expressions, or containing mysteries above our finite comprehensions: but all those things which are necessary to be believed or done, in order to our salvation, are delivered to us with the greatest evidence and clearness. For what does the Lord require of us, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God; to repent us heartily of our past sins, and to have

have a lively and stedfast faith in the merits of our Redeemer.

These are truths so plain and clear, that nothing less than voluntary ignorance can hinder men from understanding them. And indeed nothing can be more absurd than to suppose, that God hath prescribed any duties which cannot be understood; or that when it was his merciful intention to discover to men the terms and conditions on which he would save them, he should do it in a manner exceeding the bounds of our understanding. On the contrary, we may conclude, as the Apostle observes, that if "the "Gospel be hid, it is hid to them alone who are "lost; whose minds the god of this world hath "blinded, lest the light of the glorious Gospel "of Christ should shine unto them."

Secondly, The things contained in the scriptures are delivered in a powerful manner; with such a voice of authority, that they do not so much intreat as command our acceptance. The expressions in which our duty is contained are such as awe men's consciences and penetrate their very hearts and secret thoughts. Before this word of God all things are open and naked: it is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-

edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit: it comes armed with the majesty of God, and therefore, like him, enforces reverence, and carries with it irresistible conviction and efficacy.

Thirdly, The things contained in scripture are delivered in the most persuasive and convincing terms. They speak of all things necessary to be done by us in a way agreeable to the lowest capacity; they use the most familiar expressions and comparisons, that they may find the easier admission into men's minds: they propose things as our interest, which are our duty: they allure us to do what we are in conscience obliged to do: hence it is, that God so often in scripture recommends our duties to us under all those motives which are likely to make the greatest impression upon our minds, and annexes gracious promises to our performance of them; promises of the greatest weight and concern; such as his grace, his favour, protection, deliverance from present evils, and eternal life. God calls and exhorts men to obedience, when he might not only command us to obey, but inflict immediate punishment for our disobedience. Hence are those affectionate strains we so often meet with in scripture; "Oh! that my people "would

"would hear me!—Oh! that they were wise,
"that they understood this, that they would
"consider their latter end!"

But fourthly, The scripture may be considered as a rule of life to us; as a law of God, which is given for the government and well-being of mankind.

And thus the excellence and comfort of them will appear, if we consider the nature of those duties prescribed, and the encouragement to the practice of them. The nature of them is such as is most becoming God to require of us, as being most agreeable to the divine nature, the imitation of which is the end of our religion. For to become as like our heavenly Father as this imperfect state will allow, is the perfection of our being, and it is that alone which will qualify us for, and even make us capable of relishing, the joys of heaven.

For could we suppose it possible for God to admit an unrepenting, unregenerate sinner into his presence, with all his crimes and corrupt inclinations about him, heaven would be no heaven to him, but rather a place of torment, where every thing would be contrary to his favourite sentiments and leading passions. And therefore

we are so often exhorted in scripture to imitate our heavenly Father, and to be perfect as he is perfect; to imitate him in his goodness and holiness by our constant endeavours to subdue our passions and corrupt affections, and to increase in virtue and piety; to imitate him in his grace and mercy by our kindness to all men, by forgiving injuries, and doing good to our very enemies; to imitate him also in his justice, by doing as we would be done by, and by keeping a conscience void of offence towards all men, and by a steady adherence to his religion.

Again: The nature of the duties prescribed in scripture is such as is most reasonable for us to perform; because religion is the service of our most reasonable faculties. The commands of scripture reach to the heart; the service required is a spiritual service; not consisting in meats and drinks and outward ceremonies, but in a right temper of mind, and a due conformity of our actions to the law of God. Nothing is required but what it is our interest to perform, and nothing is forbidden us but what would disturb the peace of our minds here, and be destructive to us hereafter.

And as the services are just and reasonable, so the motives and encouragements to perform them

them are great and glorious. We have the promise of the divine Spirit to strengthen our weakness in running the race that is set before us; we have the meek and holy Jesus as an example of patience and perseverance in holiness; we have the noble army of apostles and martyrs for our patterns in faith and constancy; we have the assurance, that God will never leave or forsake us; we have the holy scriptures for our guide and comfort; and we have the certain hope of an immortal crown of glory for our reward hereafter.

Thus we see then how excellent and comfortable the scriptures are for all the purposes of a happy life; for doctrine, for correction, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness.

How much then does it become us to receive them with reverence and attention! For the clearer are their evidences, the more gracious their promises, the more extensive their privileges, the more noble their doctrines, the greater also will be our condemnation, if we neglect or despise them.

What remains, then, but that we resolve to make them the constant guides and companions of our lives.—Let us meditate upon them, my

brethren, when we lie down and when we rise up. Let us teach them to our children and families; let us be thankful to God for having given us so inestimable a blessing; and, above all, let us be careful to follow the commandments and copy the examples of holiness contained in them. Thus shall we enjoy the surest support against the changes and chances of this mortal life; thus shall we discharge the duties we owe to those committed to our care; thus shall we be the happy instruments of leading others to God, and shall finally assure to ourselves a glorious place in his eternal kingdom.

SERMON LVIII.

PROVERBS xxii. 6.

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

AS our future welfare and eternal happiness depend upon our present conduct and behaviour in the well-ordering our lives; and as we shall be intitled to an eternity of bliss or misery, according to the manner and proportion of our religious exercises; so we should make it our first and chief business to acquire so much religious knowledge, as, when rightly obtained, and duly practised, will make us wise unto salvation.

Yet there is nothing more clear, than that the bulk of mankind give themselves very little trouble to form right apprehensions of the religion they profess, and therefore are always liable

liable to fall into gross and fatal errors, or to become the prey of every artful and novel teacher. We see this verified in fact, both by those numerous swarms of sectaries, which are every day starting forth from the prolific soil of enthusiasm, and by those strange notions, which the greater part of mankind, if they think at all about the matter, entertain concerning religion: some placing the whole of it in a careless and formal belief of its doctrines; some, in forsaking a few notorious sins; others in observing the stated times of public worship; others in doing wrong to nobody; and others, again, in having a warm and enthusiastic faith and pious inclinations, but without the necessary concomitants of obedience and a holy and virtuous life.

But, alas! these are fatal mistakes of the nature and temper of Christianity. For, to be Christians indeed, we must not only profess with our mouths, and believe in our hearts, the sublime doctrines of our divine Teacher, but we must also endeavour to live, as he lived; that is, an holy, blameless, and unspotted life; we must have the same mind and spirit in us that was in him; we must act upon the same great principle which he inculcated, of obtaining an unseen, everlasting glory; and we must neglect all things rather than the salvation of our immortal

souls,

souls. This, in brief, is the sum and substance of Christianity, which it is the duty of every Christian at all times clearly both to understand and to practise. But the best time for instilling right notions of these great duties, is that of early youth. We therefore find the office of training up children in the way they should go, not only to be venerable for its antiquity, but also expressly of divine appointment. For thus says God himself by the mouth of Moses, in the Old Testament:—"These words, which I com-"mand thee, shall be in thy heart, and thou "shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, "and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in "thine house, and when thou walkest by the "way, and when thou liest down, and when "thou risest up."

I know not whether it may be of much consequence to observe, that the word, which is here translated "to teach," signifies also "to whet "or sharpen*;" importing, as some think, that parents should endeavour to make the commandments of God pierce the very hearts of their children; or, as others imagine, so to teach them with accuracy and care, that their minds

* So in the margin of the Bible; or "to beat," as on an anvil.

may be rendered thereby more acute and perspicacious. However, in either sense it clearly imports the diligence parents should use to instil good principles into the minds of their children, and to work in them a reverential fear and love of the divine majesty of God; never ceasing their most earnest endeavours to persuade them to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and to serve him with all their heart, and with all their mind, and with all their strength *.

But farther: this duty of instructing young children was not confined within the narrow bounds of the old law only; though that alone were sufficient warrant to continue the practice; but our Saviour, the Founder of the New Testament, has likewise commanded Peter, and through him all succeeding pastors, to feed his lambs; that is, the infant flock of Christ committed to their charge. And in like manner St. Paul enjoins the Ephesian parents to "bring "up," or educate "their children in the nur"ture and admonition of the Lord."

And if we turn our eyes from precept to practice, we shall find that the Jews were so careful

* Vide Patrick in locum.

in

in this respect, that they not only had amongst them public seminaries of education, called the Schools of the Prophets, supposed to be first instituted by Samuel, where the will of God was first made known, where future events were predicted, and where the sublimer mysteries of religion were taught, but also had in every village a person called the Instructor of Babes, whose business it was to teach children the law, till they were ten years of age. And at the age of thirteen they were brought to the house of God, in order to be publicly examined; and being then approved and recommended to the favour of God, with devout prayer and solemn benedictions, were declared to be the Children of the Precept; that is, they were obliged to keep the law, and from thenceforth were considered as answerable for their own sins. All which, as it nearly resembles, so it may justly seem to have ministered some ground to the christian rite of Confirmation *.

And with no less zeal did the primitive Christians build up their children for Christ, and with unwearied care and diligence instruct them in the fundamentals of their religion. And for this purpose they had in every church a peculiar

* Vide Hammond. Acts xv. 32.

officer,

officer, called a Catechist, whose business it was to instruct the catechumens, that is, those who were candidates for baptism, in some places for two whole years together, besides the more solemn catechizing of them during the forty days of Lent, preparatory to their baptism at Easter. And after the performance of that sacred rite, it was usual for the baptized persons to remain several days in the houses of the pious bishops of those uncorrupted times, that they might be the more fully instructed in all things pertaining to eternal life; or, as my text expresses it, "trained "up in the way they should go."

I need not perhaps observe, that the word "train" is a military term, signifying to teach the discipline or exercise of war. In the margin of our Bibles it is rendered "catechize a child." Either of these translations is clear and intelligible enough. So in the following words *, "in the way he should go," the original will admit of two interpretations, yet both consistent enough with each other, and with the wise man's general design of recommending, that the young

* The Hebrew is, "in the mouth of his way;" i. e. say some, in the entrance or beginning of life; early. Mercer says, the Hebrew signifies "the measure of his way;" i. e. according to the measure of a child's capacity.

and

and ignorant be trained by early instruction to habits of piety and virtue, that, when they are old, they may not depart from them.

To this doctrine and practice it hath sometimes been objected, that there are instances of those, who, notwithstanding a good education, have proved very bad; and of others, who notwithstanding a neglected education, have turned out well.

That there have been such instances, I will not take upon me to deny. But, I believe, no man will pretend to say, that they are not very rare and extraordinary, and therefore can be no ground of argument against the general utility of early instruction. Besides, as the vices and miscarriages of the one might have been still greater, if they had not been restrained by some remains of early culture; so possibly the improvements and excellencies of the other might have been more eminent and conspicuous, had the tender shoots of virtue been watered by the refreshing dews of instruction.

We may farther remark, that what carries the appearance of virtue, is often nothing more than the natural effect of constitution, or even sometimes the consequence of some over-ruling vice. For

For thus, a languid imagination, a sedate temper, and an insensible heart, are almost certain preservatives against the common vices of youth, without any degree of culture whatsoever. And in maturer years, even avarice, the most hateful of all vices, will produce sobriety, chastity, prudence, and a general decency of behaviour in life; which, though it proceeds from no good principle, yet in the eye of the world will carry the appearance and semblance of true virtue.

And, on the other hand, where the passions are keen and impetuous, even the best education, though it may check and moderate, yet it will not always hinder them from breaking out into those vices, to which they have a natural and constitutional tendency. Yet surely we have no more reason to attribute the vices of the latter to the effect of education, than the seeming virtues of the former to the want of it.

We may farther remark, that the miscarriages of persons who seem to have had a good education, if narrowly examined, might frequently be traced back to some capital defect in their education itself: for those who are most desirous of instilling good principles, are not always the most capable of doing it; and the ill-timed fondness

ness of a virtuous parent, or the injudicious discipline of a well-meaning preceptor, may have as fatal an influence on the future morals of a child, as an avowed neglect of his education. And even the virtuous conduct of those, whose education has been neglected, may probably arise from some early, though unobserved, impression; especially in a country like this, where instruction presents itself, in every shape, from the pulpit, from the press, and even in the private circles of civil intercourse and conversation.

I would farther observe on this head, that though the wisest methods we can pursue in the cultivation of youth, do not always make them exactly such as we could wish them to be, yet there will always still be one thing remaining, which well deserves the most serious consideration; namely, that those who have become wicked after a good education, are frequently reclaimed; but those who are wicked without any instilled principles of goodness, are hardly to be reclaimed without a miracle, unless one should rise from the dead to persuade them.

We may therefore justly conclude, that the training up of children is absolutely necessary, as well to preserve them from the corruption and

wickedness of this world, as to build them up for the glory and immortality of the next. In our infant state, we may not unfitly be compared to uninformed travellers. We have a large and trackless space before us, and without a guide we know not which way to steer our course. On this side are straits and difficulties, and on that, hazards and inconveniences: we step forward, but it is with diffidence; we move, but it is with fear: as well knowing, that every advance in a mistaken path is not only so far deviating from the right way, but is also such a progress in a wrong one, as must be trodden over again with shame and sorrow. It is therefore highly necessary that we should call in the aid of some guide, who can direct our steps aright.

And happy is it for us Christians, that we have a guide, whose information is clear and infallible. We need but open the volume of God's unerring wisdom to learn all that concerns us to know, either relative to ourselves or others: we there see the whole scheme of our existence and the lines of our duty clearly marked out. We are there informed, that we are the offspring of God himself: that this corporeal mass is animated by an immortal soul, which will not sleep for ever, but will be sentenced to an eternity of happi-

happiness or misery. To guide us to the former, we see the Captain of our salvation pointing out to us the ways of pleasantness and the paths of peace: he places before us life and death; he promises eternal rewards to our good deeds, and threatens destruction to our bad ones: he tells us, the strait way leads to life, but the broad one to misery: he opens the gates of righteousness to all that are willing to enter, and rejects none but those who wilfully exclude themselves: and, finally, to assist us in our christian course, he has assigned a variety of fit and experienced guides to direct the unskilful, to support the weak, and to exhort and encourage the fearful.

Of these guides the first and more especial are always natural parents.

They are more particularly bound to see their children religiously and virtuously brought up; because, next under God, they gave them their being, and therefore are concerned to provide for their well-being. And, indeed, what can be so desirable to a parent, as to educate his children in the way of salvation? To see them grow in grace; to behold their opening virtues; to insure to them a possession which no change or chance can take away here, and which will make them saints in glory hereafter. And, on the

other hand, what can be so dreadful, as the idea of having brought a child into the world, only to be the prey of sin and wretchedness here, and the subject of never-dying torments hereafter? Let no parent, therefore, think that he has done his duty, till he hath done all that lieth in him to make his children acquainted with God and their duty, and to make them pursue that good way, which leadeth to eternal life.

But farther; besides natural parents, civil parents are also concerned to assist in training up children. By civil parents I mean magistrates, tutors, and heads of families; who, though they give not the first being to those under their care, yet are bound, in a subordinate degree, to consult their well-being. And therefore,

1st, All magistrates, as such, ought in their several stations, not only to countenance and favour, but to protect and support, nay, farther, to command and enforce, as far as their authority extends, the due practice of religious education, especially among the lower orders of the people. They ought to imitate the example of the good king Hezekiah, who was both himself a pattern of good morals, and also "spake "com-

" comfortably unto those that taught the good " knowledge of the Lord."

2dly, They are likewise in duty bound to the discharge of this necessary office, who professedly undertake to superintend the education of youth. They are entrusted by natural parents; and a great and important trust in truth it is; since no less than the welfare of every nation may justly be said to depend upon it. And though the more immediate design of their profession, as teachers, may be only to train up those who are committed to their care in human literature, yet they should ever remember, that " the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wis- " dom" both human and divine, and therefore should be careful to lay this, as the best foundation of their intended superstructure. And indeed, unless youth are bred up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, the most shining abilities will only make them more capable of doing mischief, and the most cultivated talents will only make their want of probity the more glaring and conspicuous. And therefore much will they have to answer for, both in the sight of God and the world, who are the causes of this mischief, by neglecting to give a proper bias to their minds in the early, innocent, and flexible period of life.

And on the other hand, there is no order of men, who deserve better of the public, than those teachers, who faithfully discharge the duties of their function, and are careful to form the manners, as well as the tongues, of their pupils. To perform this important office, David did not think it beneath him to descend from his royal throne:—"Come, ye children," says he, "and hearken unto me, and I will teach "you the fear of the Lord." And in all nations where arts have had their due esteem, much respect hath been paid to the teachers and professors of them. Thus the civil law of the Romans exempted professors of grammar and rhetoric from the burden of public taxes and offices; established their maintenance, and even continued those privileges to their families. Thus again, Theodosius, a prince of singular goodness and humanity, enacted a law in favour of those who had taught grammar twenty years in Constantinople, and had, during that time, approved their skill and diligence to the senate; that they should be ranked with those who were possessed of the highest honours in the eastern empire.

We read also of many noble princes, who have bestowed the highest honours on their preceptors; treating them as parents, and even professing,

professing, like Alexander, that they owed more to their good breeding, than to their birth.

I could not forbear saying thus much in favour of a profession, which is certainly too much sunk into contempt, and to which, in my opinion, much too little attention is paid by those, whose duty it is to attend to the welfare of a corrupt, luxurious, and declining empire. And though part of this contempt may justly perhaps be charged to the ignorance or viciousness of some of the professors, yet it should be remembered, that in every profession, the number of able and worthy professors will always bear a certain proportion to the honours and emoluments which accompany it. There is no reason, therefore, to expect, that many persons of distinguished abilities will engage in so arduous and laborious an employment, so long as the fashion shall continue to lavish away enormous sums on men of the most despicable professions, and to grudge even a moderate pittance to those, whose business it is, as a * wise father expresses it, "to polish God's image, the soul "of man, and to adorn it with virtue and wis-"dom."

* Chrysostom.

3dly, As the parent and tutor, so also masters of families are concerned in this necessary and important work. They are to govern for God as well as for themselves, and to teach his ways as well as to command their own works. In them is united both the office of magistrate and tutor; they being what the former is in his proper department, and the latter among his pupils: therefore, under the obligation of both in conjunction, they are strongly bound to perform this part of duty belonging to civil parents.

Lastly, The spiritual and ghostly parents concerned also, are the governors and ministers of the church, who are to contribute to the new birth, and administer nourishment to the spiritual life. Indeed, their very office consists especially in this duty, to train up all their children for God in the way they should go, and at the same time, by their public and private exhortations, to stir up others to a faithful discharge of the trust committed to them.

We see, then, from this ample provision of guides and instructors, which God has made for training up children in the good way, of how great consequence it is in his sight, and therefore

fore how dangerous the neglect of it will be to the several persons concerned in it.

It is impossible to lay down all the particular rules necessary for the right discharge of this duty. But there are three things which the wisdom of our Church hath specially recommended, and therefore I think it my duty briefly to touch upon.

The first of these is Baptism. This the Church hath enjoined for every Christian to begin his life with, and also hath commanded us to pray, that every Christian's life may be according to this beginning. We cannot, therefore, bring our children too soon to this initiatory rite. For, as all are born in sin, it is our concern to rescue them from it by the laver of regeneration, which is the seal of the covenant thereby entered into with God, and the sign of their admission into the church and flock of Christ. And as parents ought not to neglect or delay this necessary sacrament, so they ought to attend the administration of it with piety and decency; considering it at once as a solemn dedication of their children to God's service, and as reminding themselves of the covenants they entered into at their own baptism.

The

The second thing which offers is Catechising; which, as I have before observed, is of divine institution, and hath ever been practised by the Church of God in all ages, as the best method of instilling divine knowledge; insomuch that a * good author informs us, that there never was a kingdom for forty years after Christ's passion, which did not receive the Gospel in this method only. And therefore Julian the Apostate began his attempt to undermine Christianity by a suppression of catechising, as well knowing that the main support and growth of religion depended upon it. And for a proper form of catechising we need look no farther than to that, which is enjoined by the authority of the Church; which, from its plainness, is easy to be understood; from its brevity, is easy to be learned and retained; and yet is sufficiently full to inform and instruct the young Christian in every necessary point of faith and duty. This, therefore, every parent should carefully teach his children in private; and I hope it is the practice, as I am sure it is the duty of every parochial minister, to call upon them, at stated seasons, to repeat it in public; that even the elder sort may take occasion from thence to be instructed, to examine the grounds of their faith,

* Ægesippus.

to

to renew their vows, and from thence to enlarge their spiritual meditations.

Lastly, To catechizing succeeds Confirmation, which not only advances, but compleats the institution of a Christian. By this he undertakes, in his own name, every part of his baptismal vow, and receives the prayers and benedictions of the Church; which henceforward admits him, as a compleat member, to the holy Sacrament, the highest and most sacred of her mysteries, as being now sufficiently trained in the way, wherein he must ever hereafter persevere to go.

And here the public institution of our children ends. All has been done for them, which is in our power; and, in all likelihood, what has been done will be sufficient to lead them on to salvation, if they are not wanting to themselves. Only, in the use of the means, parents should always be careful to set a good example before their children, to maintain a prudent discipline over them, and to recommend them by daily prayer to the grace and protection of God, who alone is able to build them up unto salvation.

Suffer me, then, to exhort you, who are parents, seriously to charge yourselves with the perform-

performance of this duty towards your children; in the neglect whereof, you can never acquit yourselves in the sight of God, or of your own consciences, in the great day of account. Consider how valuable a treasure is committed to your charge, even the eternal salvation of those, who ought to be most dear to you, and for whom Christ shed his most precious blood. Think it not, therefore, much to bestow some labour on so important a matter: think it not much to set apart some leisure hour for this very purpose; if on every day, it would not be too often; but on the Lord's day, at least, it is indispensably necessary. We all complain, and that but too justly, of the profligacy and wickedness of the times in which we live. And consider with yourselves how it can be otherwise, so long as the education of your children is so shamefully neglected.—When you neither will take the necessary pains to instruct them yourselves, nor even send them, or suffer them, to hear our instructions. Nay, what is worse, when you openly teach them, by your own examples, the most powerful of all teaching, to neglect or violate every divine ordinance; when the child catches oaths and curses from the parent's lips; when he breaks the Sabbath by his parent's commands: when he abstains from the public

public worship of Almighty God, from seeing his parent always absent.

Believe me, my friends, you may now make light of these matters, as too many of you do: you may shew your contempt of God and his ministers, as too many of you do, by seldom or never approaching either his church or altar; you may bring up your children, as too many of you do, in heathen ignorance and brutal impiety:—but a day will come, when these things will sit heavy upon your minds. Whilst health and strength support your spirits, you may put off the intrusions of conscience and the reproaches of wisdom. But we, to whom the melancholy office is assigned of attending your last moments, well know what a change of sentiments a bed of sickness will produce. When a deadly paleness overspreads the cheek; when anguish hovers on the brow; when the review of your past lives strikes you with horror; when the dread of a just God and impending judgment distracts your guilty thoughts; where then is all your boasted fortitude? where then is all your contempt of divine things? which of you then does not wish that he had served God more, and the world less? which of you then does not wish that his life was to come over again, that he might bring up his children in the

the fear of God; that he might reverence his sabbaths and his sanctuaries; that he might be as exemplary in holiness and virtue, as he has been eminent in debauchery and wickedness. Consider these things with yourselves; and may God give you a better understanding for the time to come, that ye may see the error of your ways, and amend them; and that * "ye may "so endeavour to sanctify the lives of you and "yours, and to fashion them after the rule and "doctrine of Christ, that ye may be wholesome "and godly examples," of piety, temperance, sobriety, and of every christian virtue!

* Ordination Service.

SERMON

SERMON LIX.

Acts ii. 37.

When they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

IF there be joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, what unspeakable transports must he feel, that opens the gate of heaven to a multitude of sinners, and, at the same time, both saves himself and those that hear him!

Of this pure and transporting pleasure was God pleased to afford St. Peter a very large share, on that remarkable occasion, when the words of the text were spoken. And, indeed, some need he had of consolation, to balance the many evils he had to encounter, The enemies of

of that Gospel which he was called to preach, were many and powerful, and, therefore, the course of his ministry could not but be full of trouble and affliction: in fact, when his heavenly Master called him to the apostleship, he also called him to martyrdom: when he said to him, "Feed my sheep," he immediately said also, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou "wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst "whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt "be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, "and another shall gird thee, and carry thee "whither thou wouldest not."

To encourage him, therefore, in his arduous undertaking, and to sweeten the bitterness of that cup of sorrow, with which his preaching was to be attended, he gives him the greatest comfort that can possibly be enjoyed by a man, who labours for the salvation of others; for at his very first discourse, no less than three thousand persons were converted to the faith and obedience of the Gospel: the Spirit of God so wonderfully diffused itself through all those Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, and Egypt, and many others, who were assembled at Jerusalem to celebrate the feast

feast of Pentecost, that no sooner had St. Peter declared the mighty power of God in raising up Jesus from the dead, than vast numbers "were "pricked in their hearts, and said, Men and "brethren, what shall we do?"

Nor need we much wonder at the great impression which this discourse made upon their minds, if we attend to the several circumstances with which it was accompanied; such, for example, as the noble boldness and undaunted courage, with which the Apostle addresses himself to them.

Now, no earthly consideration could possibly hinder him from speaking with all imaginable boldness; because he could not doubt either the truth or the importance of the great doctrines he taught. He had himself conversed familiarly with his Saviour, and heard him speak as never man spake: he was with him on the holy mount, and "heard that voice which came to him from "the excellent glory, saying, This is my beloved "Son, in whom I am well pleased;" he saw him risen from the dead, laden with the spoils of death and hell; he saw him taken up into heaven by a cloud, and the angels standing by him in white apparel.

Neither could he doubt of the sufficiency of his own calling: for he had an immediate call from heaven: the Author and Finisher of our faith said to him, "Thou art Peter, and upon "this rock will I build my church."

Neither did he fear the reproaches of men: for he was able to put them all to silence by the purity of his intentions and the innocency of his life. And, had he been so inclined, he could not comply with the corrupt customs of the world in flattering vice or gilding falsehood; for the doctrines of his Saviour compelled him to threaten eternal misery to those that complied with them, and to promise eternal happiness to those that abstained from them.

Neither, again, could he turn his back to pains and torments, or deny the faith through fear of persecution: for he well knew his former cowardice and denial had cost him very dear, and drawn from him many heavy sighs and bitter tears. No wonder, then, if, thus deeply affected with the truth and importance of his doctrines, he spake with boldness and intrepidity, and made such an impression upon his hearers, that "they were pricked in their heart, and "said, Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

2dly,

2dly, The impression made by this discourse of St. Peter would naturally be the stronger, on account of the miracle which preceded it; that is, the gift of tongues, which was shed upon the Apostles.

And of this miracle they could have no doubt, since it had every mark of a true miracle. For,

1st, It was above human power, and differed from the ordinary and known laws of nature. There is no species of knowledge more incapable, according to the established connection of cause and effect, of being acquired in an instant, than that of tongues. Some men indeed may, by the strength of superior genius, with ease attain to that, which others cannot acquire without labour and difficulty: but the knowledge of tongues must unavoidably be in all a work of time and study: for the rules of every language being arbitrary, complex, numerous, and varying according to the genius, customs, and manners of every nation; a man might as well pretend to know the transactions of past ages by the strength of natural parts, as to speak a variety of languages without practice and previous instruction. And yet the Apostles, who were known to be illiterate men, and without education, in a moment clearly understood and rea-

dily expressed all those arbitrary signs of language, which those, who were gathered together out of so many remote nations, made use of to convey their thoughts. Nay, what is still more, they offered to communicate the same miraculous gifts to others, who believed their doctrine; so as effectually to remove every suspicion of fraud and collusion, and to evidence the co-operation of a power more than human.

Another mark of the truth of this miracle, was, that it was done in the presence of those, whose interest it was to investigate the truth of it; without which it could not induce them to embrace the religion it was intended to support. For, had it been done clandestinely, or in a corner, like the pretended miracles of the Romish church, men might naturally have suspected some deceit and imposture: but when it was done in the face of the sun, before enemies as well as friends, there could be no room for suspicion or contradiction. Indeed it is a maxim among the members of the Romish communion, that the presence of a heretic hinders the working of a miracle: but this was so far from being St. Paul's opinion, that he expressly says, that "tongues are for a sign;"—to whom?—not to "them that believe, but to them that believe "not;" that is, to those, who, like the multitudes

tudes assembled upon this occasion from every nation, were not yet convinced of the truth of the Gospel. No wonder, then, when they saw the hand of the Deity, thus plainly stretched out in the miraculous effusion of the gift of tongues, they should be thereby disposed to attend to the words of his messenger and ambassador.

But, 3dly, To the power of miracles the Apostle added the greatest strength of reasoning.

Now the surest way of reasoning is to argue upon an adversary's own principles; so that though what we say should be false, yet he cannot deny it, if it has the same foundation and the same degree of probability with what he believes to be true. But when we can prove, that his arguments are likewise a proof of ours, then it adds such strength as no reasonable man can resist.

The first of these methods was used with great success against the heathens, and the second against the Jews.

Thus Justin Martyr, in his Apology for the Christians, very justly tells the heathens, that

they had no just cause to hate them, or to reject the doctrines they taught: for, by declaring the first-begotten of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, to be born of a pure virgin, to be crucified, dead, to have risen again, and ascended into heaven, we say no more, says he, than what yourselves say of those whom you call sons of Jupiter; one of whom ye worship as his interpreter and your divine teacher*, and another ye declare to have been smitten by a thunderbolt, and afterwards to have ascended into heaven†; so that if ye believe these things, ye may as easily believe what we, on much stronger grounds of evidence, say concerning Jesus Christ, and his resurrection and ascension.

The second method of reasoning was more successfully employed by the Apostles against the Jews. For by that they clearly proved to them, that they ought to believe in Christ for the same reason that they believed in Moses, and that the same arguments, which obliged them to be of the Jewish religion, equally obliged them to believe Christianity: as if they had said, "What proof can you bring of the "truth of your religion, which will not like-"wise conclude in favour of that which we

* Mercury. † Esculapius.

preach?

" preach? Do you allege the high authority of " the lawgiver? We will own to you, that Moses " talked with God in the holy mount, as a man " talketh with his friend: but has not the " Christian Lawgiver a still higher authority, " whom God raised from the dead, and set him " at his own right hand for evermore?

" Again, you say, that your religion is so " pure, that its only end is to bring men to " God, to turn them from idolatry, and fill " them with piety to God and charity to man. " Now that which we teach does the same, and " in a still higher degree: we exhort you to " repent of your sins, that you may be meet " partakers of the promise made unto you and " to your children: we exhort you to love all " mankind, and to put on that excellent bond " of charity, which so unites us, that we sell our " possessions, and have all things common.

" If, again, you allege miracles as a confir- " mation of your religion, we have also the " same confirmation of ours: for, behold! " through the name and power of that Jesus, " whom ye slew, and hanged on a tree, the " dumb speak, the deaf hear, the blind see, the " lepers are cleansed, and the dead raised; and " greater miracles than these ye cannot have.

" If, again, ye bring the predictions of the " Prophets to support your belief, these also as " strongly support ours: for we can, by unde- " niable evidence, prove, that all those things, " which the Prophets have foretold concerning " the Messias, are exactly fulfilled in our Jesus; " in him is fulfilled that antient prophecy, 'Thou " wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt " thou suffer thine holy One to see corruption;' " which some of you indeed falsely apply to " David, though he is long since dead, and his " sepulchre is with you: in him too is fulfilled " that other prophecy, 'The Lord said unto " my Lord, sit thou on my right hand until I " make thine enemies thy footstool.'

Such was that strength of reasoning, by which St. Peter wrought conviction in the hearts of his hearers.

4thly, To strength of reasoning he added the most awakening reproaches of conscience, by setting before them the barbarities they had exercised against their Saviour, the Lord of life. " Jesus of Nazareth," says he, " a man ap- " proved of God among you by miracles, and " wonders, and signs; him, being delivered by " the determinate counsel and foreknowledge " of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands

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" have crucified and slain." Was it possible for them to hear these words without the most bitter shame and remorse? Could they reflect without anguish of heart, that this Jesus, whom they had crucified, was He, who had preferred them to all nations? Could they without horror reflect, that they had inhumanly silenced that blessed voice, which cried out, " I am not sent " but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel?" Could they without the most wounding reflections hear, that He, whose brows they had girt with a crown of thorns, and whose hands they had insulted with a sceptre of mock royalty, was " the mighty Lord, the everlasting God, the " Prince of peace?" Must it not astonish them to be told, that He, whom they had so unrelentingly followed with the loud exclamations of " Away with him, crucify him, crucify him," was the Lamb that was slain for the sins of the whole world? Well, therefore, might they be " pricked in their hearts!" Well might they cry out with terror and astonishment, " Men and " brethren, what shall we do!"

5thly, The Apostle strengthened these terrors, by setting before them the just judgments of God, which awaited their sins. He knew that lenient methods would have little effect on such an audience. He knew that they who had dipped

dipped their hands in the blood of the Son of God, were not to be moved by mildness and persuasion. He therefore sets the vindictive terrors of the Almighty in array against them: he strikes their guilty minds, by warning them of that great and terrible day of the Lord, so often mentioned in their antient prophets, in which God would come to take vengeance on them for the murder of his Son, and fulfil that heavy curse, which they laid upon themselves when he was devoted to the cross, "His blood be upon "us and upon our children."

And, to make the deeper impression upon them, he tells them, that the antient prophecies were now in part fulfilled; that the signs which were to precede that great and terrible day of vengeance, were come to pass; that the Spirit of God was already poured out upon all flesh; "the young men saw visions, and the old men "dreamed dreams;" that they might even see with their eyes the forerunners and beginnings of that destruction which awaited their nation: already Herod had by bloodshed fixed the Roman eagles on the portal of their temple: already Pilate had displayed the Roman banners in the heart of Jerusalem, and threatened death to those who opposed it: already the Roman generals had overrun Judæa with a formidable army, and unsheathed

unsheathed the sword of desolation: as their own * historian tells us, twenty thousand Jews were massacred in Cæsarea, thirteen thousand in Scythopolis, and fifty thousand in Alexandria, without distinction of age or sex.

These then were surely awakening presages of the great and terrible day which was coming upon them. Well might they, therefore, when they heard these things, be pricked in their hearts, and cry out, "Men and brethren, what "shall we do?"

Brethren, what was then their situation, is now, in some sort, ours. We have not, indeed, like them, with our hands crucified the Lord of life; but by our sins do we not daily crucify him, and put him to an open shame? We have not, indeed, like the Jews, the sword of vengeance hanging over us, to punish us for our sins by temporal death; but the just judgments of God await us, to punish us for them by death eternal. We have not, indeed, like them, the preaching of an Apostle to awaken us by a divine eloquence and an irresistible power of argument; but we have the scriptures of God to instruct us, and the Spirit of God to warn

* Josephus, B. ii. C. 19.

us by its silent impulses and internal monitions. Let us then wisely listen to its holy dictates. It is not yet too late to cry out, "Men "and brethren, what shall we do?" but how soon it may be so, God only knoweth!

Whilst, therefore, we have time, before the door of mercy is shut, let the voice of repentance be heard in our dwellings, and let us prostrate ourselves before the throne of mercy.

And though our sins be great, yet let us not despair of mercy. "Jesus of Nazareth, the "man approved of God by signs and wonders," is still powerful to save. It was not to the Jews alone that he said, "Come unto me all that "travel and are heavy laden, and I will give "you rest:" the same rest is still offered to all that truly turn to him in this and every age of the world. Think not, however, that a slight or hypocritical repentance, that a feeble or insincere faith, that a partial or irresolute obedience, will entitle you to this rest. Remember that the God who pricketh the heart of the sinner, can also search the breast of the hypocrite. We must one day stand before him, naked and undisguised, stripped of all those little arts and flimsy coverings, which hide our secret sins from the view of man. And even now, there is not a thought

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in our hearts, or a word in our tongues, but he knoweth it altogether. His eye now looks down from heaven upon us in this his holy place, and reads the sincerity or hypocrisy of our devotions. Happy they, who are not afraid to meet it; who can say, with the noble confidence of David, "Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my "heart; prove me, and examine my thoughts; "look well if there be any way of wickedness in "me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

SERMON LX.

MICAH vi. 8.

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?

WERE we to form our sentiments of religion by the general practice of those who profess it, we should be tempted to imagine, either that God had given no religious system, or had given it in such a manner as could not be understood. For how often, in all ages, has it been made to consist in things which do not come up to its nature, or in things which are directly contrary to it? Men know that they have laws for moral behaviour; they know that they have acted in contradiction to them; and, from a sense of danger, they have endeavoured to be at peace with God; but not in the way of his

his appointment, but of their own. Thus, in the heathen world, men were terrified by their sins, and therefore invented an endless and unprofitable variety of expiatory ceremonies and sacrifices. The people of Israel were happy in a clearer knowledge of divine things: yet too many of them also laid all the weight of repentance upon outward things, upon numbers of offerings, thousands of rams, and corporeal lustrations. And even Christians, though blessed with a Gospel of life and immortality, yet are too apt to place religion in things which are only the circumstances and appendages of it: they will rend the garment, but not the heart: they will fast and pray, and attend divine ordinances, and then fancy that they have discharged the whole of their duty.

To such men the words of the text are fitly addressed. In the beginning of the chapter from which they are taken, God enters into a controversy with his people, and, by the mouth of his Prophet, states the folly and unreasonableness of their being dissatisfied with his service; since he required nothing at their hands but what was fitting for a God to receive, and man to give. The Prophet then introduces the people, as it were, sullenly demanding of God, what he would have their conduct to be:—

"Wherewith

"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?" Is not what I do for him in the way of sacrifice sufficient for the atonement of my sins? Will he have all my estate, my flocks and herds, my sons and daughters; all the fruit of my body? Will nothing please but the sacrifice of all I possess? No, says the Prophet: this is not the aim of God: so far from this, that he requires none of these things, in comparison of duty: he hath shewed thee what is good: what is infinitely beyond the fat of rams, or rivers of oil; even "to "do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly "with thy God."

Whether we take the inquiry preceding the text in this sense, as expressive of a sullen dissatisfaction at the service of God, or in the sense I have before mentioned, as expressive of an uncertainty and doubtfulness about the fittest and most acceptable method of serving him, the Prophet's answer is equally applicable, and descriptive of our whole duty, and therefore it would be mere waste of time to consider to which interpretation the preference is due.

It is evident from this declaration of the Prophet, that an obligation lies upon every man to behave dutifully towards God. "He hath "shewed thee, O man, what is good," and

therefore what is required of thee: for nothing is insisted upon for our practice, but what is either good in itself, or has a tendency to make us so. God has too much knowledge not to understand what is necessary to duty, and too much wisdom not to enjoin what is so; and, therefore, there is no man capable of duty, who has not within him clear intimations of that duty. For, to say, that even a single duty exists, which it is not in the power of man to know, is to fix an imputation upon the Almighty derogatory from his exalted and gracious attributes. God hath certainly shewed every man living what is good, and what it is he requires: and, therefore, every act of disobedience must be resolved into a want of inclination to duty, and not a want of knowledge of it. Even the Gentiles themselves had no sufficient excuse for sin: because, though without the law of revelation, they had a natural law within themselves: their conscience told them, that there was an essential difference between right and wrong, and that there was an obligation upon them to follow the one and avoid the other.

Now this obligation to duty forces itself upon us in a variety of ways, by which we may be as sure that something is due to God, as that we had our being from him: for it cannot be imagined,

gined, that the Almighty should concern himself in stationing us upon this earth, and then withdraw every concern from us:—manifest therefore it is, that God has a demand upon our conduct, as he is our sovereign Lord, the eternal King. And his claim, like his being, is infinitely above every other; and we can no more be absolved from our allegiance as subjects, than we can from our dependence as creatures. We cannot create or maintain ourselves, and therefore we are not to live to ourselves: the right of creation clearly sounds the right to subjection.

There is no lord but, has some service due from those who hold under him: and shall the Sovereign of all worlds have millions of dependent creatures, and receive no homage from them?—this cannot be:—and, therefore, to say, that there is no debt of obedience due from us, is to exalt our nature above God's design, or, rather, to step into the place of God himself.

But farther: we may clearly deduce our obligations to duty towards God, from the constitution of our own natures.

Where there is no capacity of knowing, reasoning, and determining, there, indeed, is a plain

exemption from duty: for, where nothing is known, nothing can be done. But is this the state of man? By no means. For, though one part of us be taken from the dust, yet another speaks a higher original, and shews that we have within us an inspiration from the Almighty. By our mental powers, we are of the kindred of heaven, we are allied to God himself: and surely, when the relation is so great, the acknowledgment should be so too. We see ourselves the most eminent creatures of this lower world, and capable of the noblest purposes: it cannot be consistent therefore, that we should live for no purpose. Is there such a delightful thing as knowledge? Is there within us a power to know? Then, either we must employ the power to that end, or say that we have it from God in vain. Is there, again, such a thing as loving, honouring, and serving God? and is there in us a capacity of doing this? Then it clearly follows, that this capacity ought to be employed, and that God ought to have our best services. We are born subjects into the world, and, therefore, are not to live unsubjected to laws, in the progress of life. Our birth is, as it were, a consecration of our being to God.

But, even were this short of argument; did not the constitution of our natures prove God's claim

claim to duty; yet his requisition of obedience brings the matter to a demonstrative certainty. For who can doubt whether man owes any thing to his God, when God himself declares, that he requires something of us? If we should think that his being our sovereign, or that our capacity of being governed by laws, are insufficient evidence of our obligation to duty; yet every doubt must cease, when we hear the voice of God himself declaring his laws to us, and requiring obedience from us: for God knows no such injustice as to make applications where he has no claim: he knows no such weakness as to arrogate dominion, where he has no jurisdiction, or to promulge laws, where he has no authority. Since, therefore, he demands our duty, we may be well assured that he has a right to it.

We may farther remark, that as God has a clear right to our duty, so also he has clearly pointed out to us the line of our duty. "The "Almighty has shewed us what is good;" he does not expect obedience, without declaring in what he would be obeyed. Even those who have not the revelation of Jesus, are not without the principles of knowledge and duty, though they may not reason upon them, or improve them into that amiable rectitude of manners to which

they would lead them: they have the work of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing them witness, condemning their vicious, and approving their virtuous conduct. But this knowledge of God and our duty, discoverable as it may be, in a great measure, by the natural reasonings of men, yet comes much improved to us by the kindness of God in the declaration of a Saviour. He, who came to save us from the destructive consequences of sin, brought to light so clear a manifestation of what God requires from us, as must ever remain an unanswerable argument against a thoughtless and unreclaimed sinner. For, whatever others, who have no relation, may plead for ignorance of duty, it is certain that the man, who has the privilege of a written word for his guide, can have no such plea: every page of this contains a full representation both of what he ought to do, and what he ought to leave undone. In the sacred volumes, we are so well taught the nature of God and that of man, that, without the greatest perverseness, we cannot be ignorant of the duties which result from them; especially, when we find the same duties confirmed to us by the documents of an internal monitor. For we do not so much learn any thing new in the sacred writings, as we find all our natural sentiments established, and the practice of what is good recommended

mended by new motives of higher encouragements. For we are not to imagine, that together with Adam fell all the notions of good and evil: the great duties of man are of an eternal, unchangeable obligation, and would have remained in full force, even if we had had no revelation. But in the scriptures we see the stern rigour of duty softened by the graces of divine goodness. We there behold God, not in those beams of offended majesty, which no man dares approach unto; but in the lineaments of his original beauty, as our Creator, our compassionate Father, our most perfect Friend. We see every thing graciously pointed out by him, which is necessary to our perfection in virtue, and the promise of every thing which will make us perfect in glory.

Having, therefore, so great a light, let none of us say that we cannot see it. Let us not say, that we have yet to enquire, which is the way to God in duty here, or which is the way to him in glory hereafter? The reasonableness of religion is so plain, and the particulars which compose it so clearly laid down, that willingness of mind is more wanted than reach of understanding; and he who cannot see his duty in the present day, may be assured, that it is not from any difficulty in the thing itself, but from an un-

conquerable blindness, arising from a viciousness of disposition.

Thirdly, We may remark, that the good which God has shewed to man, and what he requires of him, consists in justice, mercy, and humble walking with God. These he requires on account of their own intrinsic worth; and if he requires any thing besides, it is only with a view to promote the practice of those: for these only can perfect our natures, and, therefore, other things are only in order to the perfection of these. We may, therefore, justly here take occasion to observe, that all modes and ceremonies in religion, which have occasioned so much heat and animosity in the world, are not that good which God has shewed to man, or which he will accept without a holy life. These can never make the observers thereof perfect, because they might, or might not, have been appointed: and whatever is variable in its nature, is not of the essence of religion: for true religion, is like God himself, unchangeable: but there have been different ceremonies in different ages of the world, even where God himself has been the appointer of religious worship: and therefore, what is not always a duty, cannot be the whole of what is necessary to moral perfection. And, in fact,

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we know by woful experience, that men may attain to the utmost perfection of ceremonial observances, and yet remain wicked and unregenerate.

Here, then, we find the whole of religion summed up in three things, Justice, Mercy, and Humility in the sight of God; and we may assure ourselves that religion consists in nothing but these, because nothing but these is required of us: these are religion without other things, but other things are not religion without them.

And first, We must do justly; that is, in other words, we must give to every one their rights. To do justly, sometimes means to be attentive to the whole of religion, and includes the duty we owe to God, our neighbour, and ourselves. Sometimes it has a more restrained meaning, and only regards our neighbour in all his rights. And sometimes it is taken in a still more contracted sense, and means only, that we are not to steal or defraud. Here it seems to imply generally, that we are not in any shape or manner to defraud our neighbour: and this includes the following things; that we do not detain from any what is his property, whether it belongs to him by virtue of our word given, or of any thing done for us: that we do not take from

from any one his right, whether it be in his own hands, or those of another: that we do not injure him by our tongues, either by malicious representations in private, or by false testimony in public: that we do not invade his property, either by private theft or open violence: that we neither look out through the envious eye to the things of others, nor wish them to be our own: for justice lays a restraint upon the mind, that it shall not covet, as well as upon the hands, that they shall not steal; and great is the reason for it; for they who once entertain unlawful desires will soon be tempted to break out into unlawful actions. These, then, are the great outlines of justice; and surely we cannot deny, that they contain a most fair and reasonable duty. We readily feel the propriety of other men's being just to us, and surely, then, there is the same propriety in our being just to them: the reason of the duty is the same in all: the relation we bear to one another calls for it, and the God who made us, and made us dependent upon each other, has an undoubted right to demand it from us.

Secondly, We must love mercy. This is, as it were, an enlargement of justice: for justice, in the common acceptation of the word, is the doing what we may be compelled to do by the laws

laws of men; whereas mercy is shewing ourselves kind, where man cannot compel, though God has bound us by his laws. Or, in other words, we may say, that mercy is an improvement of justice: for, in many cases, if we are not merciful, we are not just. There is frequently something due to our neighbour, which he cannot legally demand from us, as well as something which he can demand. Thus justice demands the payment of a debt, but mercy requires the relief of misery. Justice says, that we ought to resign what is the property of another, but mercy goes farther, and declares that we ought to give up something of our own, in obedience to the command of God, though there should be no human law existing, by which we are compellable to do so.

Lastly, We must walk humbly with God; that is, we must entertain humble sentiments of ourselves, and not destroy the value of our excellencies, whatever they are, by making them too much our own. And, indeed, where is the foundation for a triumph, when we derive both our being and every perfection of it from another? Besides, whatever perfections we may have to boast, we have also enough of sin to bewail: humble then we should be, even in our best moral estate, and lamentation should fill

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our hearts that we are not still better. We must also shew our humility by being the ready observers of every divine law. We must think that the same power which made us, has also a sufficiency of wisdom to guide and govern us, and that, therefore, our understandings are to be directed by the truth, and our wills by the choice of God. We must farther express our humility by frequency and fervency in our adorations: we must go often to God in prayer and praise, be zealous in public attendances, enter the sanctuary with holy thoughts, composed countenances, and raised affections; we must be patient and resigned amidst the afflictive dispensations of God, receive and use his blessings with sobriety, and piously look forward to an eternal reward, not as the fruit of our own services, but the effect of his divine mercy. When thus we think, when thus we act, we truly walk humbly with God: and let us be assured, that a human creature can never appear more amiable, than when, divesting himself of all false pretensions, and acknowledging his own unworthiness, he kneels afar off, and without daring so much as to lift up his eyes to heaven, smites upon his breast, and adopts the language of the humble publican, "God be merciful to me a "sinner!"

Thus,

Thus, then, we see it is incumbent on every man to practise the great duties of justice, mercy, and humble walking before God. It now remains only, that I close the whole with a few short inferences from what has been said.

First then: Hath God shewed us what is good? Let no man then pretend to say, that he does not know, or cannot find, his duty. This is an express contradiction to the text, which was dictated by the infinite God himself. Has a man a Bible in his house, and yet ignorance of duty in his head! This is, because he will not, and not because he cannot, know God.

Secondly, Doth God require what is good? Then how great is the folly of those, who think that Christ came to the destruction of virtue. This is a bold representation of God indeed, that he should by his prophets, in the Old Testament, give laws of virtue and righteousness, and afterwards by his Son, by the evangelists and apostles, in the New Testament, cancel and destroy them.—Will it be said by the advocates of antinomianism, that God hath shewed us faith, and this is good? True: it is good, as it influences to the three great requisites, of doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. But let a man once separate it from these

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moral, unchangeable duties, and it will be impossible to find in him one single vestige of a true Christian.

Thirdly, Are we commanded to be merciful? Then I infer, that a barely just man is very far from being a perfect Christian. He, who considers his neighbour in no higher instances than those of bare justice, does not consider himself as a sinner, and that if God should act towards him as he does towards his fellow-creatures, he could not find mercy. If God had been severely just to his laws, we should never have had the opportunities we now have from mercy. And surely we may do something from compassion to others, when so much has been expressed to ourselves. What will it avail that a man is strictly just in his house or shop, if he has no mercy, no tenderness, no charity, for the distressed members of Christ? The gains of justice, if not employed in acts of mercy, will only plead our condemnation at last. It is the merciful man only, that shall, now, and eternally, find mercy.

Fourthly, Must we walk humbly with God? Then I infer, that religion is not one single instance, but a continued train, of love and duty. It is not the passing work of a day, but the continued

tinued business of a whole life. Can a man, who has a journey to go, and sits down in idleness the whole day, accomplish it by a few hasty steps at night? Much less can we reach heaven by an occasional repentance, and dying professions of love. The profits of religion only attend the practice of it. Whenever, therefore, we cease from it, we divest ourselves of its present and future rewards; for it is not what we have done, but what we are doing through every day, which must constitute our character and consolation.

Fifthly, Must we walk humbly with God? Then I infer, that we must have an outward lustre before men, as well as an inward glory before God. Inward religion is the foundation, but outward profession must be built upon it. The one recommends us to men, the other insures our approbation with God. It must centre in the heart, but it must stream out into life. It must command the soul, but dart through the body, and irradiate our outward actions. The man, therefore, who walks humbly with God, will walk acceptably among men.

And now, upon the whole, what better things can we practise, than those which God has shewed us to be good? What better precepts can

can we conform to, than those which have so much of God in them? What better words can we take for our meditation, than to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God? Let us not separate any of them from practice: for all must unite to make us good and happy men. Let us be just, but not so as to be unmerciful. Let us be merciful, but not so as to forget walking humbly with God. And finally, let us advance in these things: that so our increase of days may be an increase of hope in God.

SERMON

SERMON LXI.

ON WHITSUNDAY.

ISAIAH xliv. 3.

I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed.

THE spiritual blessings of God are frequently represented in scripture under the metaphor of rivers and streams, which water the ground and render it fruitful. Under this metaphor is here clearly pointed out that plentiful effusion of God's Spirit, which was again and again mentioned by the Prophets, as the peculiar blessing and privilege of the gospel-times, and which was, as on this day, realized in the persons of those great multitudes, who were assem-

bled together out of all the nations of the world.

The nature of this spiritual blessing, arising from the effusion of the Holy Spirit, the ancient Prophets, likewise, in various places, foretold.— "Thy children shall be taught of the Lord," says Isaiah. Analogous to which is the language also of Jeremiah, "No more shall every "man teach his neighbour or his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know "me, from the least of them to the greatest, "saith the Lord; and all thy children shall be "taught of the Lord." Agreeably to which, our Saviour, who had witnessed the completion of all these prophecies, in the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, tells us, "It is written in the Prophets, They shall all be "taught of God:" and then draws from it this important conclusion, "Every man, therefore, "that hath heard, and hath learned of the Fa- "ther, cometh unto me."

To display the importance of the instruction here promised, I shall consider the character of the Teacher, and the peculiar nature and effect of his divine instructions.

First,

First, then, the Teacher is that almighty Being, to whose awful voice Isaiah of old summoned the whole circle of created nature to attend:—"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O "earth: for the Lord hath spoken."

And as the Author of these instructions is great, and superior to all beings, so also various and powerful are the modes of his instructions: He teacheth us by that word, which made a Felix tremble on the seat of judicature; he teacheth us by those works, all which, like the heavens, declare his glory, and, like the firmament, shew his handy-work; and, lastly, he teacheth us by that Holy Spirit, which was this day shed abroad on the hearts of the first Christians. In his word, he hath given us a compleat discovery of his will, which every one that runs may read: "He hath shewed thee, O man, "what is good," in language that cannot be mistaken, but by wilful ignorance or gross corruption; and in three words, Repentance, Faith, and Obedience, hath comprized more than is contained in all the cumbrous volumes of ancient learning and philosophic investigation.—God teacheth us also by his works. It may seem, perhaps, disgraceful for man to be sent to learn of irrational objects; for the Lord of the creation to have worms and insects for his instruc-

tors: yet, even the least and lowest of God's works are capable of teaching man knowledge. They teach us the wisdom and greatness of Him, who made them all, in number, weight, and measure: they teach us our own nothingness and insignificance in the sight of Him, who is able to hold the heavens in a balance, and to divide the sea through his power.—But we are most perfectly taught of God by his Spirit; because by that he teacheth us to subdue our passions, to bend our stubborn wills, to purify our hearts, and to prepare them for the reception of those great and important truths, which are necessary to lead us into the way of salvation.

Do we want to be informed of the advantages of having God for our instructor; let us turn our eyes for a moment to the nature and quality of his instructions.

And 1st, God alone is able to teach us with certainty and efficacy. Consult the boasted masters of human arts and sciences, the proudest and best pretenders to learning and reason; what will you discover?—precisely this: that all pretensions to science are precarious and unstable, and that even the most laboured deductions of reason are fallible and problematical; that truth is mingled with falsehood, and obscu-

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rity with evidence; and, lastly, that even the bare knowledge of all this uncertainty and vanity of mortal science cannot be acquired without much time, and labour, and vexation of spirit. But God is able to convey divine knowledge to us in one moment; to produce the efficacious energy of saving faith by a single impression; and to reveal to us unchangeable truth without labour, and without any alloy or mixture of error.

2dly, It is our peculiar happiness to be taught of God; because God alone can teach us that most important of all knowledge, the knowledge of salvation.

It is an evident proof of the divinity of the Christian religion, that neither men nor angels knew those mysteries, which are now the objects of our faith: nay more, they are not able to comprehend them, even when they are revealed: it is therefore neither men nor angels that revealed them, but God only that has taught them to us. We are therefore justly said to be all taught of God; for without him, we know not how to believe aright. Without his light, nothing is light: without his wisdom, there is no wisdom: but when his voice is heard, darkness and uncertainty fly before it; when his word

goeth forth, it giveth light and understanding to the simple.

We no longer remain, therefore, full of fears and doubts;—trembling under guilt;—conscious of having deserved punishment, yet ignorant how to seek for mercy;—tired of the follies and miseries of the present life, yet fearful of looking forward to that distant region, which, though perhaps visible, was too much covered with clouds and darkness to afford either pleasure or comfort in the prospect. But now all is plain and open: God hath said, "Let there be "light," and there is light: life and immortality have burst the barriers of chaos and ancient night, and are brought to light through the Gospel: God has taught us, and we know,—that most important of all knowledge,—what we are, and what we may be; what is the intention of our existence here, and which is the way that leadeth to life eternal.

3dly, God teaches us to practise the virtues of which he gives us the precept, and of which his Son, the blessed Jesus, set us the example. He teacheth us so to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom: He teacheth us to subdue our passions, and to put away all filthiness of flesh and spirit, which debases the

nobler faculties, and sinks the man into the brute. And without this instruction, though in the language of St. Paul, we understood all knowledge; though we had explored the fate of empires and kingdoms, from the beginning of time; though we could speak, like Solomon, from the cedar in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; yet all our boasted science would be no more than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal; useless to the great purposes of moral discipline and advancement in virtue.

Let us, secondly, consider the effect of the divine instruction:—"He that hath learned "of the Father," says our Saviour, "cometh "unto me."

It was the Father who spake to the patriarchs and prophets under the Old Testament, at the publishing of the law upon mount Sinai: But how did he speak? He spake to them in thunders and lightnings; and his voice was so terrible, that they cried out with fear and trembling, "Let not God speak to us any more, "lest we die." But He, who condescends to speak to us now, has laid aside those beams of majesty, which no man dares approach unto, and speaks peace and reconciliation to his

people. The Son of God has disarmed omnipotence of its terrors, and by his death hath reconciled man to his Father, whose offended justice called aloud for vengeance. We have therefore no longer received the spirit of bondage to fear, but we have received that spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, father: we can therefore approach and learn of him without terror; and whilst we adore the perfections of the all-powerful God, love and esteem the kindness of the universal parent.

Hear then the Father, and learn of him, and he will guide you to his Son: He will lead you to repentance, and from repentance to faith in Christ, and from faith to holiness and obedience of life. This is what you may learn of God, and be assured that you can learn it of no other: "For though ye have ten thousand instructors "in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers:" there is one only who can lead you to the fountain of life, and make you wise unto salvation.

But what then are the truths which we shall learn of the Father? They are great, and of inestimable value. We shall learn, that God has infinite mercies and blessings in store for us: that, though we are vile and miserable sinners, yet the riches of his grace exceed the number of our

our sins: that though your sins be as scarlet, yet they shall be made white as snow: that if your souls be dead in trespasses and guilt, yet God is able to quicken them: though they be soiled and polluted with the corruptions of the world, the blood of Christ can purify them: though they are in a state of condemnation, he can absolve them: that, though they are weighed down and oppressed, he can set them free: that his power extends to all cases, and his invitation is made to all that groan under the burden of guilt; "Come unto me, all ye that "labour and are heavy laden, and I will give "you rest; and ye shall find rest to your "souls."

We shall farther learn from God, that the sinner who hears him has a right to all his gracious promises, and to all the glorious advantages displayed in the Gospel. And this is an information, which is necessary to encourage every penitent sinner to go on from repentance to faith: for, at the beginning of his conversion to God, the sinner naturally entertains humble and desponding thoughts of his state; because he feels with horror his own unworthiness, the blackness of his ingratitude, the atrociousness of his guilt, and the severity of impending judgment, if he should be summoned, in an unregenerate

nerate state, to the throne of God. He therefore dares not apply the promises of the Gospel to himself: he looks up to the cross of redemption, but it is with fear and trembling: he sees the beams of mercy darting through the black clouds of error, ignorance, and guilt, but he dares not approach to their heavenly effulgence.

In this melancholy state, God condescends to instruct his ignorance and to dissipate his fears by the vital energy of his Holy Spirit. He makes him feel and know, that the arm of the Lord is not shortened; that the banner of salvation, streaming with the blood of his Son, is held out to all nations; that the great Shepherd of souls came purposely into the world to seek and to save that which was lost; that he wishes all men to come to the knowledge of the truth; that his Holy Spirit is ever ready to help their infirmities, and to lead them on from strength to strength, till they reach that glorious summit of christian perfection, from which, looking down, as it were with defiance, upon every created and sublunary object, he can cry out in the animated language of apostolic exultation, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, "nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor "things present, nor things to come, nor "height, nor depth, nor any other creature, "shall

" shall be able to separate me from the love of " God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Call to mind the instructions, which God has at any time given you, by his word, by his works, by his providence, by the still voice of conscience, by the calls of his ministers, and you will find them all center in this one point of bringing you to Christ. By every blessing you enjoy, and every misery you suffer, he makes you feel the hatefulness and horror of sin, and therefore the necessity of flying to Him, who is alone able to take away sin.

Again, by the constitution of every thing which is in you and around you; by the frame and essence of your dearest enjoyments, by the caducity of the friends you love when living, and by the ashes of those whom you deplore when dead, the same God instructs you in the vanity and emptiness of every mortal and present blessing, and therefore points out the wisdom and importance of depending upon Him alone, who is the resurrection and the life.

Feel you not again within yourselves the painful struggles between virtue and temptation, the fiery combat between lust and reason, the sturdy reluctations of conscience before the commission of

of sin, and its stinging lashes and reproaches after it?—And what are all these but the documents and monitions of the Father, warning and directing you to fly for succour to Christ, through faith, in whom alone ye can obtain the whole armour of God, those celestial aids of the Holy Spirit, which are necessary to strengthen your weakness, and to enable you to withstand the assaults of the world, the flesh and the devil?—Such too is the language of his written word in every page; such is the instruction of the wide volume of his providence, whether considered as extended over nations and empires, or confined to individuals; such too is the voice of his ministers, who are the ministers of Christ, who stand here to exhort you in the name and words of Christ, and whose constant language is simply this:—Go, ye children of care and sorrow, from a vain and transitory world, where misery accompanies you from your cradles to your graves; go to Him, who holds out to you the prospect of a better world: you have too long laboured for the meat that perisheth, you have too long been laying up treasures on earth, where rust and moth corrupteth every enjoyment of life. Cease therefore to expect happiness in a state where sin and sorrow are inseparable companions; and look up to that better inheritance, which God hath provided for you, with

with a lively faith and just confidence; learn of the Father, and go to Christ, the anchor of hope, the helmet of salvation, the author of eternal life: and then, though mortal pangs afflict your body; though affliction rain upon you her bitterest drops; though nature successively tear from you, with agonizing violence, every dear and tender connection of life, and finally even life itself; yet, in every state, whether of life or death, ye shall find rest and comfort to your souls.

Need I then call upon you to listen to such an instructor? Need I remind you, that He who condescends to teach you in these various ways is no less than the Creator of all things, the great Judge of quick and dead; to whose awful voice the prophet of old so pathetically summoned the circle of nature to attend:—"Hear, "O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the "Lord hath spoken." Need I address you in the solemn language of the writer to the Hebrews,—"See that ye refuse not him that speak-"eth: for if they escaped not, who refused "him that spake on earth, much more shall "not we escape, if we refuse him that speaketh "from heaven." Need I tell you, that his instructions are of more importance than the treasures

sures of Golconda or the gold of Ophir?—That it depends upon your attention to them, whether ye shall be reserved in chains under darkness for ever, or be raised on wings of seraphs to the regions of glory, and honour, and immortality? Need I say, that the time of listening to this divine Instructor is not in your own power? To you, indeed, he still speaks by my voice: and may he not speak in vain! But remember, that "the dead hear not his voice, neither all "they that go down into silence:" and small is the line which divides the living from the dead: it is an undefinable limit; it is an imperceptible, unsubstantial boundary, which affords no support or security against time and chance: you may, therefore, in a moment be compelled to hear that awful voice speaking in judgment, which you now refuse to hear when speaking in mercy: you may, this very night or hour, be reduced to that hapless state, where all that can be done is, to regret the neglect of those opportunities, which, when once past, are never, never to be recalled; to bewail in darkness and everlasting burnings the loss of heaven and happiness. Let us, therefore, whilst we have time, hear and learn of the Father, that we may become his dear children. Let us go to the Son, that we may be one with him, even as he and the

the Father are one. And may the Holy Ghost, which was on this day shed abroad on the hearts of the disciples of Christ, descend into our hearts, to help our infirmities, and to seal us to the day of redemption!

SERMON

SERMON LXII.

MATTH. vi. 24.

——*Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

SO said the Saviour of the world: yet man, presumptuous man, confiding upon his own strength, in opposition to heavenly wisdom, will still go on to make the dangerous experiment. He still hopes to unite his pleasures and his duties, his interests in this world and his hopes in the next, his love of God with the service of mammon. But repress these vain and fallacious hopes, thou child of folly, and learn wisdom from him that redeemed thee. The love of the world and the love of God are things as incompatible, as the blaze of meridian splendor and the darkness of midnight. To be a half Christian is to be no Christian, or, what is much the same, is to be a Christian to no purpose. Either, therefore, entirely reject the terms of the Gos-

pel, or entirely embrace them: either be entirely a Christian, or entirely a lover of the world: for, be assured, thou canst not, at the same time, serve God and mammon.

And who is there, that rightly considers, who can doubt, even for a single moment, that God, and God alone, is to be served and adored? We are commanded to love him with all our heart and with all our soul: now the word "all" excepts nothing; therefore our heart neither ought to be, nor can be, divided between God and the world. Since, therefore, we are convinced of the being of a God and his perfections, and profess to believe the Gospel, we must necessarily acknowledge, that this good and gracious God ought to be the only proper object of our love as well as our adoration: that is, as he alone ought to be worshipped, by humbling ourselves in his presence and submitting our desires to his will; so, for the same reason, he ought to be loved with an affection incommunicable to the creatures, both by reason of his own infinite perfections and the blessings he has bestowed upon us; so that we cannot justly refuse our homage to that Sovereign of the universe, to whom we are indebted for so many obligations.

Again:

Again: We have received from God a mind and a heart: a mind, to know the value and excellence of every being; and a heart, to proportion our esteem and love to their merit and excellence. And when we have considered the most excellent of created beings, if we afterwards extend our thoughts to the Creator, we shall find an infinite distance between them, which obliges us to regard the Creator as the first principle of all things. We are obliged to acknowledge, that our existence depends upon this first principle, and that we live and move by its influence alone. God is the great fountain of life and light: we are beams derived from, and subsisting only by his pleasure. Are we not, therefore, bound to love and serve him alone, who is alone perfect and unchangeable, and by whom alone we ourselves exist at all?

Again: If we consider the infirmities of life; the infinite multitude of diseases to which it is subject, and the fears and anxieties which hourly surround us in this vale of tears; we shall easily perceive, that the only means to preserve us against these melancholy changes and chances, is to secure an interest in Providence: And how shall we do this but by loving and serving God, who is the disposer of all events, and to

whom all things in heaven above and earth below do bow and obey?

And farther; if we take a view of ourselves and our actions, we must confess, that we have often behaved ourselves in a manner so unworthy of reasonable creatures and children of God, as to give us abundant cause to dread the consequences of his displeasure. And yet he has been so far from inflicting those punishments we have deserved, that he has not only spared us from time to time, but even found out the means of reconciling us to himself by the sacrifice of Christ. And who would not then love this Father of mercies, who so first loved us, that he gave up his only Son to die for repenting sinners?

And if, from the sins and miseries of life, we turn our eyes to that melancholy event by which they are closed; if we reflect that the arm of death is always lifted up over our heads, ready perhaps to strike the fatal blow in an hour when we least think of it; what method is there so proper to assuage the fears with which this unrelenting king of terrors fills us, as to arm our souls with the hope of never-dying glory? And what method is there so proper to secure to ourselves

ourselves this hope, as to love and adore Him, who is able to destroy both body and soul to all eternity?

Thus we see, then, that it is our interest, as well as our duty, to love and serve God. We cannot be happy, unless we are sure of a safe asylum against all the dangers of life: we cannot be easy, unless we are able to quiet our conscience, when it is full of remorse from the remembrance of our past sins: we cannot enjoy life, unless we can comfort our hearts against the fear of death by a sure and well-grounded hope of immortality. Now it is God alone who can be the author of all these blessings: it is he alone who can preserve the life which he has given us: he only can pardon our sins: and he only can quicken our mortal bodies at the last day. Since then God is all-powerful and all-merciful; since he has neither rival nor equal, who, like himself, is able to save and to destroy, to kill and to make alive; to God alone we owe all our worship, love, and service, in so full a manner, that they cannot be given to any other creature or being without sin:—"Ye cannot "serve God and mammon."

We may observe, that our Saviour has chosen mammon from among all the false deities of the

heathen, to shew us that nothing ought to be put in competition with the living and true God. He does not say, Ye cannot serve God and Jupiter, or Saturn, or Mars, or any of the numerous tribe of heathen idols; but he chuses mammon, the god of the world. And the reason of this will be obvious to an attentive mind. There were two sorts of idols, to whom the heathen world directed their service and adoration: the one were the deities of a mistaken mind; the others were the idols of a blind and corrupted heart: they served the one by outward rites and ceremonies, through fear and ignorance; the other they worshipped out of a principle of love and interest. Now the former, which owed their existence to superstitious ignorance, and had no other being but in men's deluded imaginations, would naturally be abolished when the scales were removed from their eyes, and men began to reflect upon the folly of such vanities; because they had no foundation in reason. Our Saviour, therefore, without laying any stress upon these vain idols, which were only the creatures of superstitious ignorance, and therefore would of themselves fall to the ground, applies himself wholly to guard us against that other species of service, which was paid to the idols of a blind and corrupted heart: these are the temptations and delusions of the

world: these, he knew, would ever remain as snares to draw men from the worship of the one true God: he knew that every thing was to be feared from their wiles and seductions, and therefore declares in the most solemn manner the utter impossibility of serving both:—"Ye cannot "serve God and mammon."

Thus our Saviour puts God and the world in opposition: God, as the author of heavenly blessings, and of that happy life which he promises to us in eternity; and the world, as the apparent cause of the happiness and pleasures of the present life. And knowing that they were too contrary to each other in their maxims and principles, ever to be united in the same desire of our heart, or acquired by the same means, he therefore forewarns us to be upon our guard, and so to govern our affections, that the love of this life may not destroy our hopes of a better:—"Ye "cannot serve God and mammon."

But though the Redeemer of the world thus kindly sets before us our choice between God and the world, between momentary and eternal happiness, yet there are too many who reject the gracious offer, who forsake God and cleave to the world. For what else can we think of those unhappy numbers, who indulge themselves in

the habitual sins of drunkenness, profane swearing, neglect of the Sabbath, and other heavy crimes. If they believe the Gospel, they can hope for nothing after this life, and consequently can have no other God but this world. What, again, shall we say of those, who devote their whole strength to the pursuit of worldly honours and riches: who say unto their gold, Thou art my hope; and to fine gold, Thou art my confidence? As their hopes must end with their lives, so it is plain, that the god they worship is mammon: this is the god that goes before them, and, as they falsely think, can supply all their wants, and satiate all their desires. But we need not look far to see the folly of such a conduct. Our reason will tell us, that man is more excellent than the beasts, and that the immortal soul is preferable to a gross and material body: that life is frail and uncertain, and bears no proportion to eternity: that peace of mind and a quiet conscience are of more value than ten thousand worlds: that God, the Creator, can alone fill and satisfy the capacities of an immortal soul, and therefore ought alone to be served and adored.

Besides, even if eternal happiness were out of the question, we should still be much mistaken, if we thought to find solid and constant happiness in any of the enjoyments of the god of this

world,

world. The experience of all ages and of all men will tell us, that they are false and deceitful; that they fill our hearts with continual fears and anxieties, and are not capable of assisting us in any of the pressing necessities and storms of life. Wisely, therefore, did our Saviour admonish us not to lay up treasures upon earth, (if any of the perishable things of this world can be called treasures,) but to lay up treasures in heaven, which no power or chance can destroy or take from us.

Let us consider, then, that there is a happiness to be enjoyed after this life, which the world, with all its treasures, cannot give; which intimately and immediately affects our souls. Let us, therefore, possess our souls in patience and expectation of eternal happiness. And of this happiness let us remember that God is the only author: he, therefore, only ought to be served and adored.

Let us farther consider, that the world is a dangerous and subtle enemy, and that it is very difficult to withstand its attacks: we ought, therefore, to live in the world, as if we were in an enemy's country, and always to be upon our guard, that it may have no access to our hearts. For many are the advantages which the world has

has over those, who do not seriously apply themselves to the service of God: for, first, the things of this world, though they have no intrinsic worth and value in themselves, are yet material and visible, and consequently make a deep impression upon us; whereas the things of religion, though more substantial and valuable, yet being spiritual and heavenly, are far above the reach of our senses, and consequently are less able to affect the thoughtless and ignorant.

A second advantage of the world is, that all its enjoyments are present and round about us; they are within our reach, and, as it were, in our hands; whereas the promises of God principally relate to our immortal part, and are reserved for a future world.

The world has a third advantage, in that its pleasures, though frail and fallacious, are however adapted to the inclinations of our corrupt hearts; whereas the pleasures of religion are so far from being agreeable to our irregular desires, that we must at all times correct, and sometimes even wholly renounce them, if we would enter into the kingdom of heaven. Hence then arise those fatal difficulties, which religion has to encounter. The world finds our natural inclinations favourable to it, and our heart always disposed

posed to embrace its offers. In our youth we are incapable of reflection, and have no other guide than our bodily senses, which too strongly war on the side of the world. And what the inexperience of youth has begun, habit too fatally confirms: so that when we come to an age capable of reflection, we too often find ourselves the confirmed slaves of lust and mammon. And when this is the case, it is no wonder the world should rival God, and dispute the dominion of our hearts with him: it is no wonder we should so obstinately cling to the gross earth, and prefer the flesh-pots of Egypt to the spiritual manna of heaven: it is no wonder we should think it a hard task to serve God, and to desert the service of mammon. But hard as the task is, it must be done. One or the other we must quit. We may have heaven, or we may have hell; we may serve mammon, or we may serve God: but heaven and hell we cannot have together: God and mammon we cannot serve at the same time.

No longer, therefore, let us think of trifling between God and mammon:—a divided service is no service at all:—God and the world are before you:—on the one of them you must fix: no longer, therefore, halt between two opinions: but chuse ye this day, whom ye will serve.

But

But remember, before you chuse, that on your determination is suspended the fate of eternity. Weigh, therefore, and deliberate, before you decide. Be not led by youthful lusts, or impelled by hasty thoughts. Look not at the present moment only, but extend your view over the great ocean of time. The mammon of the world may now greet you with smiles, and heaven seem obscured in clouds: but soon the scene will be changed: soon ye will find, that the world has nothing to offer but a few short glimpses of joy, succeeded by everlasting burnings; but that God has pleasures to bestow, which the heart of men cannot conceive, nor the tongue of angels express.

SERMON

SERMON LXIII.

PROV. xvii. 14.

The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?

NO man can want to be informed, that the road of life is overspread with innumerable calamities, which no human art can either foresee or prevent. The earth beneath us has its volcanos and earthquakes, to lay waste cities and empires, at the will of the great Author of nature. The elements above us are impregnated with stores of vengeance, which are able to scatter resistless ruin, and lay waste, in an unlooked-for moment, the labours of man and beast. The pestilence walketh in darkness, and sickness destroyeth at noon-day. The midnight conflagration robs the industrious man of half his property, and the artful deceiver, the secret thief, or fraudulent bankrupt strips him of the remainder.

remainder. And, above all, the sword of war now extends its wide-wasting ravages over half the globe, and makes children fatherless and wives widows, and drives them out from their native homes, to seek their bread,—bread watered with the tears of their couch,—in distant and desolate places.

These are, doubtless, heavy and grievous calamities, which thousands of our fellow-creatures are at this very hour suffering and deploring in this vale of tears and sorrow. Yet, after all the black catalogue of natural evils, which mortal man is heir to, that man's greatest and only real misery is owing to himself, is a truth not to be denied. For though, in the language of scripture, he be born to trouble as naturally as the sparks fly upwards, yet God is just, even in the afflictions he sends, and always proportions our trials to our strength: the unhappy sufferer under natural evils, if he be not wanting to himself, though he cannot always remedy, yet he may bear his misfortunes, by a proper application of those various consolations, which are kindly placed within his reach by the gracious hand of Providence. But there is a torment of our own creating; there is a spirit wounded with a sense of our past guilt and folly, which nothing is able to cure or assuage.

In

In other miseries, the body suffers, perhaps, but the mind is calm and serene: or, even if both are afflicted, still there are many topics of consolation to support, many arguments of reason to soften and alleviate our infirmity. But, where the spirit is wounded, when conscious guilt rends and lacerates the very heart-strings with agonizing violence, what source of consolation shall we find, what arguments can then speak comfort? The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity; the common infirmities of nature, and the incidental evils of life; but a wounded spirit,—a spirit pierced with a sense of unrepented guilt,—who can bear?

In considering these words, I shall, first, shew the various arguments, by which a man may sustain his infirmity: and, secondly, that all these arguments are ineffectual to heal a wounded spirit.

So many are the afflictions of life, so many its disasterous changes and chances, that the unsustained frailty of man must unavoidably sink under them, without comfort. But the same God who sends the affliction, sends also the remedy. We are often tossed by the rough storms of adversity, but a purer air and tepid gales succeed their sweeping violence. The almighty Father

Father of the universe has implanted in us a fountain of consolation, flowing with various streams of mercy, to refresh us, and to support the soul from sinking into the darkness of dereliction and despair. For, firſt, whoever suffers under the calamities of life, can reflect, that his ſufferings are the corrections of a kind father, who does not willingly afflict his children; of a wise God, who sees every thing past, present, and to come, and directs them all to the best ends, and for the general good. The humble Christian, therefore, will not murmur, but be patient: he will submit his own weak judgment to the unerring wisdom of Providence, and will cheerfully await the decision of his lot, knowing it is a God of knowledge and justice that orders it.

Secondly Whenever affliction befals me, I can be assured, that it will not last long. The same God, who sees me this moment, perhaps, struggling with calamity, and weighed down with a multitude of sorrows, will, in due time, either free me from the load, or enable me to bear it; he will either increase my strength, or diminish my burden; or, at least, the time will soon come, when I shall quit my sorrows and my life together; when I shall lie down in peace in the grave of my fathers; when I shall be at

rest

rest in that better country, where all tears are wiped from all faces; and what is much more, when I shall be safe in heaven, where my patience will be rewarded, and my light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall entitle me to an eternal weight of glory.

Thirdly: A man may sustain his infirmity, and draw comfort to his soul, by considering the uses of afflictions. When we are troubled, we ought ever to reflect, that what we call our misfortunes, are in reality our blessings. They are the messengers of God to teach us humility; to remind us of our weakness and dependence upon him; to call us home from the pleasures and cares of a vain world; to awaken us to a better sense of our duty; to remind us of those various moral and religious obligations, which, amidst the hurry of dissipation and prosperity, we are ever too apt to forget. These are the great ends of affliction: and if we accordingly consider them in this light, and sanctify them to ourselves by applying them to their proper uses, we shall then be able to bear them patiently, and in all our distresses learn to have joy in the God of our salvation.

A fourth source of comfort is the testimony of a good conscience. In all thy trouble this

will stand thy friend, when every other worldly consolation fails or forsakes thee: it will enable thee to bear the unjust reproaches of evil men, and the misfortunes of an evil world: it will support thee amidst thy hard struggles against the iron hand of oppression, and cheer thee under the bitter pangs of disappointed industry: when sickness invades thee, it will lighten the horrors of a bed of anguish, and give joy to the dreary silence of midnight; and when death, with all its terrors shall approach, this will speak comfort to thy soul, and enable thee to go through the last great trial of nature with hope and patience, and to adopt the pleasing exultation of good old Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant "depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy "salvation."

But the last and greatest support under affliction is the assurance of a life to come. This alone, were every other consolation wanting, is sufficient to sustain the infirmity of a man, and to smooth the rugged brow of adversity. For what is time, when compared with eternity? What the sufferings of a moment to the joy of ages? Thou art afflicted now; but thou mayest be happy hereafter. Thou hast a body, perhaps, full of disease and infirmity here; but thou wilt have a body immortal, incorruptible above.

above. Thou lamentest, perhaps, the untimely fall of a beloved child; soon shall he be restored to thy longing arms, incapable of a second fall. Thou droopest over the grave of a faithful partner: soon, soon shall ye be again united, never more to feel the cruel pangs of separation. Thou dreadest the pains of death and the terrors of dissolution: but remember, that thou hast before thee a state of existence, where the voice of anguish is not heard, and the groan of mortality is uttered no more. What is there, then, that can deject a virtuous man and devout Christian, who knows that death is but the gate to eternity, and that the dark night of calamity will soon be succeeded by the glorious day-spring of happiness and immortality?

Such are the various considerations, by which the spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity. But what will these, alas! avail to support a guilty soul?

That there is an avenging principle implanted within us, which, after having in vain endeavoured to restrain, will afterwards torture us for our guilt, there is no nation or people but has readily owned. Even the heathens felt and acknowledged this principle in the strongest terms. They tell us, that every man has within him a

silent monitor, whose approbation is of more value than the opinion of the whole world: that no man transgresses its laws, without secretly reproaching himself for it; and that the first punishment of guilt is in the stings and scorpions of an awakened conscience.

And should any one pretend to say, that this is the effect of superstition, or prejudice of education, which load the mind with ideal horrors and imaginary phantoms: I answer, Had this been the case, the united reason and wishes of mankind would long ago have detected the mistake. For there is no fallacy so artful, no error so obstinate, as always to stand against the searching investigation of truth, when men are carried on to the pursuit by interest and inclination combined. But this principle has stood the test of all ages: neither the learning nor argument of men could ever disprove it; neither wit nor raillery, those grand engines of infidelity, have ever been able to silence it.

Should any again say, that this principle is not fixed and universal; that there have been men, who have not owned its power: I answer it may be stupified, but cannot be annihilated. The hurry of business, the dissipation of pleasure, the gaiety of youth, the rotation of company, may

for a time stifle its still voice. But think not that this avenging power sleeps the sleep of death: it will awake from sleep, like a giant refreshed with wine: it will arouse to retribution, armed with tenfold terror: there is a time, when it will no longer be silenced: there is a time, when you will see the guilty driven from his boasted security; you will see him distressed and affrighted, under all the agonies, the intolerable agonies of a wounded spirit.—And far this time cannot be from him. The silent wing of life flies hastily on, and the unerring shafts of death are ever ready to spend their mortal force on me, on thee, on all. Age and infirmity are, indeed, in the general course of nature, their first victims: but, even youth and strength escape not always their deadly force. Guilt, therefore, will have its day of account, and may have it in a short and unlooked-for hour.

And when this day comes, be it sooner or be it later, whither shall the sinner fly? With what arguments shall he sustain the anguish of his wounded soul?

Will the song of folly or the voice of pleasure cheer his fainting spirit? Will his hoarded treasure alleviate the agonies of his conscience? Will the phantoms of honour calm the terrors of his

mind? Shall he fly to the arm of man for help? —These, alas! are all unable to stifle the awakened voice of conscious guilt, or heal the pains of a wounded spirit.

Shall he then look up to God?—But how shall he sustain the piercing and awful sight? He is the great and terrible God, who executeth justice in all the world: He is the offended father, whose slighted mercies and favours call for vengeance: He is the righteous judge, who will give to every man according to his works. This therefore will only add to his misery, and double the horrors he feels.

In other afflictions, be they ever so intolerable, we can comfort ourselves by looking to the end of them; as knowing that they cannot follow us beyond the grave. But in this we see no end: it is dreadful in the present view, but will be still more dreadful in the future prospect: for to the wicked, the grave is but the gate of misery; and an hereafter the beginning of sorrows.

In other afflictions, a man's own mind will speak comfort to him; will tell him, that he has applied the evils of life to the purposes for which they were intended; that he has been taught

taught by them to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man. But what comfort can the sinner feel from looking into his own mind, when all within is amazement and horror? His only chance is in blindness and oblivion. Couldst thou forget the follies of youth, that sit heavy upon thy soul; couldst thou forget the stains of manhood, that pierce thy conscience; couldst thou forget the sins of age, that weigh down thy heart with shame and sorrow; there might then be some ray of hope, some spark of consolation to cheer thee. But an awakened conscience cannot be stifled: it will have its day of vengeance and retribution.

Is there no comfort for a wounded spirit? Is there no place for the sinner to flee unto, when his burden is greater than he is able to bear? Must he lie down in hopeless anguish, or sink into the unfathomable abyss of despair?—Despair not, thou afflicted child of sin and folly! There is one way yet remaining, and that is, by flying for shelter to the mercy of God by instant repentance. He never rejects the returning prodigal, or despises the contrite heart: He never willingly breaks the bruised reed: "When the "poor and needy seek for water; when," in the agonies of a wounded spirit, "their tongue

" faileth for thirst, the Lord will hear them, " the God of Israel will not forsake them." For he desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live.

Flee therefore, O sinner, to this altar of refuge, and call upon thy God, whilst it is yet in thy power; before thy feet stumble upon the dark mountains. Let not the broken reeds of hope flatter thee any longer: thou hast too long leaned on them already, and they have now pierced thy heart. The companions of thy folly cannot save thee: they will only plunge thee deeper. A repetition of thy sins will only increase thy misery, and double the pangs of contrition. The poisonous cup of intoxication will only throw thee sooner into the arms of death, and hasten destruction. The bloody knife of suicide cannot end, it will only aggravate thy misery, by adding to thy guilt. In God be thy only hope. He will not cast thee out, if thou flee to him. The gate of mercy is still open, and angels wait around to hail thy return, and to proclaim the sound of joy in heaven over one repenting sinner. If therefore thou perishest, the fault is thy own. He gave his Son to die for thee: but thou hast destroyed thyself. Such is the only method, by which a wounded spirit may be

be healed; by which a distressed soul, sinking under the burden of guilt and tottering on the brink of despair and darkness, may look up to heaven, and catch a ray of celestial hope and consolation.

But whilst I warn those who are grown old in sin, to consider the danger of their situation, let me earnestly intreat you, who are yet untainted with guilt, to reflect, how much better it is never to be brought to this humiliating state of shame and grief; how much better it is to remember your Creator in the days of your youth, than to be compelled to drink the dregs of that cup of trembling, which ever must be the portion of the wicked. And may that God who heals the broken heart, inspire you with such a measure of his Holy Spirit and protecting influence, that you may be able to escape those fiery trials, which are ever the lot of mortality in this world of change, and chance, and sin!

SERMON LXIV.

DEUT. XXX. 19.

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore chuse life, that both thou and thy seed may live.

WHOEVER is at all acquainted with the nature and constitution of man, must know, that he is a free, rational, and moral agent: he has an understanding to distinguish between good and evil; he has a will to chuse or refuse either; and he has liberty to act in conformity to his choice. Nor let it be imagined, that this idea of the constitution of man is, like many others, matter of mere philosophical speculation, in which the bulk of mankind have no interest or concern: for, on these powers and privileges are suspended both the present and

and eternal welfare of every man living: they are to be the guides of his conduct in life: they are the foundations of his expectations in eternity; for, as they may be improved to our advantage here, so also they may be abused to our destruction hereafter. However, to prevent this abuse, the God who gave them, has done all that could be done to free creatures. He hath shewed us the consequence of our actions; he has taught us, by the use of reason and by the voice of revelation, that virtue will make us happy, and vice miserable; that virtue will be attended with a blessing, and vice followed by a curse; that virtue will ensure life, and vice bring on death. After setting these things plainly before us, God hath left us to chuse whether we would.

In this state man was left under the Jewish dispensation, as appears from the words of the text.

In this state, too, we are left under the dispensation of Christ. Our blessed Lord and Master hath done all that could be done, on his part, for our salvation. He hath set our duty before us in the clearest terms, and enforced it by the strongest motives. Having shewed us what is

good,

good, he invites us to practice it: He calls upon us not to be wanting to ourselves; he says, "This do, and thou shalt live:" thereby plainly declaring, that, though he came down from heaven that we might have life, yet it depends upon our own choice, whether we will accept of the gracious offer or not; life is promised to our obedience, death is threatened to our disobedience: both are set before us, and we must chuse which of the two we will have.

Thus we see, under both the Jewish and Christian dispensation, infinite mercy has been offered and vouchsafed to sinners: and yet to many under both, strange as it may sound, infinite mercy has been offered and vouchsafed in vain. In the Old Testament, the Almighty says of Israel, "I have cleansed you, and you are "not cleansed;" that is, I have given you all the means that could be given to make you clean, but ye have not applied them.—"What "could have been done more to my vineyard, "that I have not done unto it? Wherefore "then, when I looked that it should bring "forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"— "Why will ye die, O house of Israel! As I "live, I have no pleasure in the death of him "that dieth:—Oh! Israel, thou art destroying "thyself!"

And

And in the New Testament, Christ, though he came down from heaven to save sinners, tells us expressly, that unless we do something on our part; that is, unless we believe and repent; we shall still perish. The man, who is desirous of saving a favourite vine, can only dig about it and manure it: after all his pains, it may not bring forth fruit: and if it does not, though it be his favourite vine; though in the language of scripture, it be the man of his right hand, yet he must suffer it, however reluctantly, to be cut down, that it cumber not the ground. Thus, in spite of the repeated endeavours of Christ to save his favourite city, Jerusalem, it was, if I may be allowed the expression, beyond the power of infinite mercy to save it. The Saviour of mankind could only weep over it, and say, "Oh! Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest "the prophets, and stonest them which are sent "unto thee, how often would I have gathered "thy children together, even as a hen gathereth "her chickens under her wings, and ye would "not! Therefore, behold, your house is left "unto you desolate." From hence, then, we may clearly infer, that God, though he is not willing that any should perish, will not, however, save any but such as are willing to be saved: he will not take away human freedom, and force us into life: he will not impel us, like the arrows in the

the hand of the giant, by a resistless and uncontrolable force; he hath set life and death before us, and leaves the choice to ourselves.

Since, then, my friends, happiness or misery, since eternal happiness or misery is depending on our choice, let us take care that we chuse aright. For, however the business or pleasure of the present moment may divert our attention or beguile our thoughts, it nearly concerns us all to think of these things; to reflect a moment and be still; to commune with our own hearts, and, after the maturest deliberation, to fix and determine our choice.

And this deliberation should not, as is too commonly the case, be deferred under pretence of a more convenient season: for be assured, there is no season so convenient as the present: to-day is our's; to-morrow is not so. The voice which this day invites you in the name of God to accept of life, may soon be heard no more: and you, to whom life is this day offered by that voice, may, before to-morrow's sun rise, be incapable of accepting the offer: chuse ye, therefore, this day, whom ye will serve. "I call heaven "and earth to record this day against you, that "I have set before you life and death, blessing "and cursing: therefore chuse life, that both "thou and thy seed may live."

Many

Many an unhappy man has been ruined, before he has ever thought of chusing his principles at all. Too gay for thought, or too busy for reflection, he hurries along through life, without any fixed object in view; without allowing himself time even to consider, whither the path he is in will lead him. And thus, without any apprehensions of what he is doing, though in a matter of the last importance, the poor, thoughtless, unsuspicious wanderer runs forward to his ruin. He never thinks at all, till it is too late to think: he never chuses his way of life, till he finds himself at the end of his journey.—And then, all amazed and terrified, he sees his danger and his folly together; he chooses to live well, when, alas! he can live no longer.

Thank God, this is not yet our case! God in mercy has still given us time for thought and reflection; this day life and death are once more set before us, blessing and cursing: this day, therefore, let us consider, chuse, fix, and determine, which of the two we will embrace.

This deliberation and choice is necessary for all men, in all conditions. But I would recommend it in a more particular manner to the young; who, as the Prophet expresses himself, require line upon line, precept upon precept, to guard

guard them from ruin; to whom, therefore, I have not ceased, for more than twenty years, to whom, therefore, I shall never cease, on all occasions, to renew and repeat my exhortations, in every form which seems likely to fix their volatile and unsettled minds, and to induce them to remember their Creator in the days of their youth.

You, then, who are just entering into life, would do well, before you begin your course, to consider, how you may be able to run it with joy. Guilt excepted, you are in the state of our first parents, when issuing from paradise. The wide world is all before you: it has its pleasures, and it has its torments: it has its blessings, and it has its curses. Stand still therefore a moment, and consider what path of life you ought to chuse, that you may attain the one and avoid the other.

You are at present happy. Your hearts are as yet good, your amusements innocent, your minds unspotted: your days are spent in ease and cheerfulness, and your nights in peaceful slumbers.

And it is your innocence that makes you happy. It is the innocence of our early years

that makes us always think of them with joy. We were then undisturbed with the anxious cares of the world, and unstained with its guilt, and therefore always look back with delight to the hours of youth, and may justly be said still to take pleasure in them.

You that are now in that happy period of life, may be assured, that it is your innocence alone that makes you happy. Preserve, therefore, that innocence as you advance in life, and you will be happy still. Hold it fast, and never let it go: let not your heart reproach you so long as you live. In the words of the Psalmist, "Keep in-"nocency, and take heed to the thing that is "right: for that," and that only, "shall bring "a man peace at the last."

But think not that you can preserve this innocence long, without some knowledge of the dangers you will have to encounter in life: to the harmless simplicity of doves you must add something of the wisdom of the serpent, if you mean to be happy. For there is a smiling world before you, which will attack your unsuspecting hearts with all its flattering allurements; the charms of novelty, the gaiety of pleasure, the hopes of ambition, the prospect of advantage. These you may enjoy with innocence and moderation;

deration: God and nature equally allow it. But remember, that the only true enjoyment of them depends upon the right and innocent use of them: for, the moment you crop the rose-buds of guilty pleasure, its thorns will lacerate your consciences, and pierce you through with many sorrows: the moment you give way to the temptations of the world, you will begin to feel the cares and stings of the world; whenever you bid adieu to innocence, you must bid adieu, at the same time, to that ease of heart and peace of mind, which you now feel within you.

This is the unalterable appointment of the God who made you. He has ordained, that virtue should make you happy, and vice miserable: He has made the one productive of life, the other of death: the one of blessings, the other of curses.

Be assured, therefore, from the bitter experience of others, that this is the appointment of divine Providence, and do not risque your happiness by making the dangerous experiment yourselves. But, should your young and unsuspecting hearts entertain any doubt in this matter, enquire of the teachers of old time, and they will tell you, that "if any man lusteth to "live, and would fain see good days, he must

" keep his tongue from evil, and his lips that " they speak no guile; he must eschew evil, " and do good; he must seek peace, and en- " sue it."

Enquire, again, of the mother that bare thee, and the father that begat thee; and they will take up the advice of a wise parent of old, and say, " My son, if sinners entice thee, consent " thou not; for their way inclineth unto death, " and their paths unto the dead."

Enquire, again, of Him who came down from heaven to save thee; and he will tell thee, that when thou hast the understanding of a man, thou must have the innocence of a child, if thou desirest to enter into his kingdom; for of such is the kingdom of God:—" Except ye receive " the kingdom of God as a little child," with the same innocence of heart and goodness of disposition, " ye shall in no wise enter therein."

Believe therefore a truth which comes attested by such a cloud of witnesses, and do not add one more to the number of those unhappy wretches, who will listen to no teacher but their own sad experience; and cannot be persuaded how much virtue is preferable to vice, till they feel it, by a broken constitution and ruined for-

time, a body full of infirmities, and a mind loaded with guilt.—And how dreadful, how dangerous, must such a conviction be! It often comes too late for repentance; or, if it does not, it lays up matter of sorrowful reflection for every succeeding moment of our lives.

Consider farther these things seriously with yourselves. Would you have the pleasures of sin for a season, or the pleasures of virtue for life? Whether is it better, in your early youth, to lay up happiness, or repentance, for days, and months, and years to come? Do you wish for blessings or cursings, for life or death, for life or death eternal? Behold! both are set before you, life and death, blessing and cursing: chuse ye, therefore, this day, which ye will. But, do not think of fluctuating between both: there is no middle state between life and death, between happiness and misery. Fix, therefore, and determine on that, which seems most conducive to your happiness. And may the God of all mercy guide and direct your choice! that ye may be followers of God, as dear children, and inherit the promises of eternal life.

There are many of us,—alas! too many, I fear,—far advanced in manhood, without having fixed or chosen any certain, regular plan for

the conduct of life: such as, from their youth up until now, have either had no principles at all, or are perpetually wavering in their principles: sometimes lovers of pleasure, and sometimes lovers of God; sometimes admirers of virtue, and sometimes the slaves of vice: such, in short, as having no settled course to pursue, and no settled method to direct that course, are always like a wave of the sea, that is carried by the wind and tossed: they float at random on the wide ocean of life, the sport of every gale that blows, and not even knowing the haven where they would be.

Now the most likely way to fix such an unsteady wanderer, is to shew him the object he ought to have in view. That object is happiness. By happiness I mean not the pleasure of a day, I mean not the joy of an hour; but a happiness which will last as long as the man himself will last; that is, for ever and ever. This is the chief and only good of man. And this being fixed and ascertained, every prudent man will consider the means of attaining it. And for these means, a man, who is at all advanced in life, may safely be referred back to his own experience.

Look

Look back then, my friends, upon the time past of your life, and say, whether, upon the commission of any action contrary to your duty, your heart has not always upbraided you bitterly for your folly? Did it not almost immediately bleed within you, through a sense of guilt? Nay, does it not, even to this hour, bleed afresh, as often as you recollect your first loss of innocence by a breach of your duty? Is there not a soreness still remaining, which no time can heal, but which will continue to give you pain to the last and expiring moment of your lives?

And, on the other hand, after any good and virtuous action, have you not felt immediate pleasure and delight? Had you, whilst you were doing it, any boding, misgiving thoughts, any forbidding whispers, any secret shame and reluctancy? No: comfort, complacency of mind, and the congratulations of conscience, you all well know, have always accompanied your good and virtuous actions.

Let then the time past of our lives suffice to have wrought folly. If God hath in mercy winked at the times of our past ignorance, the follies and offences of our youth, let us not abuse the mercy of heaven still longer, not knowing that the goodness of God ought to

lead us to repentance. And, if we do not now, at least in this our day, fix and determine our choice of principles, we shall soon, very soon, unless death prevent it, advance into old age, full of years and full of follies, bending together beneath the weight of infirmities, and the burden of our sins. And surely at this last period of life, inconsistency of principle and practice appears in its utmost deformity. It always carries with it an air of absurdity and imprudence, and, therefore, is always unlovely: yet the errors of youth have something to plead in their favour: the ordinary deviations of manhood do not strike us with horror: but levity of sentiment and profligacy of conduct in advanced age, and amidst the decays and ruin of nature, is something which human nature even shudders and recoils at. "The hoary head," says the wise preacher of old, "is a crown of glory, if it be "found in the way of righteousness:" but if, on the contrary, it be found in the way of sin; if gray hairs be covered with the cap of folly, and the wrinkles of age be the companions of levity in the one sex, or of debauchery in the other; it then becomes an object, which the virtuous turn away from with disgust, and the gay and vicious behold with derision and contempt. But the censure of this world, whether it be that of the virtuous or profane, is of small weight,

weight, when compared with the heavier burden of self-condemnation. And self-condemned a man grown gray in sin will be, when, finding himself on the confines of eternity, he feels himself wretched and helpless, ashamed of the past, without enjoyment in the present, and without hope in the future. For, let a man's past sentiments or views have been heretofore what they will, at that awful moment, every thing will appear to him in its just and proper colours. The tinsel glitter of life, which dazzled his eyes in the day of folly, will disappear, and present nothing to his view but the legible characters of all is vanity. In vain will his weeping friends endeavour to console him. In vain will the man of God speak comfort to his soul. His conscience will write bitter things against him, which no powers of language can assuage. He will see what he has lost through his folly; he will feel what he has found:—an eternity of bliss for ever lost; an eternity of torment approaching! Is it possible for human reason to bear the thought? "The spirit of a man will "sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit "who can bear?" When men of the greatest charity and candour behold such an object as this in his last moments, they can only take up the same lamentation that our Saviour did when he beheld Jerusalem; they can only weep over him,

him, and say, "Oh! that thou hadst known, "even thou, at least in this thy day, the "things that belong to thy peace! But now "they are hid," for ever hid, "from thine "eyes!"

God grant that this may never be our case! And in order to prevent it, let us, in this our day, chuse the things that belong to our peace. Behold! life and death are set before us, blessing and cursing: this day, therefore, let us chuse life, that both we and our seed may live. Let us remember, that short is the day which remains for us to work out our salvation: and if we do not take heed, soon and suddenly will that night of approaching dissolution overtake us, in which no man can work. We shall then find it labour enough to close our final account: to collect the scattered fragments of human resolution, without adding to it the painful recollection of our past lives, or the sorrowful regret for our mis-spent hours. Let us, therefore, whilst we have yet time, employ every moment in the discharge of our duty, whether it relates to God, our neighbour, or ourselves. Finally, in the language of inspiration, "Whatever our "hand findeth to do, let us do it with all our "might: knowing that there is no work, nor "device, nor knowledge in the grave, whither "we are all of us speedily going."

SERMON

SERMON LXV.

Preached at Finchley, May 19, 1793, in Consequence of His Majesty's Letter in Favor of the Emigrant Clergy of France.

Matt. vii. 12.

Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

As mercy and compassion are the darling attributes of the great Governor of the universe, in the exercise of which he is said chiefly to delight; so it may be observed, that the religion which the blessed Jesus came down from heaven to establish in the world, has particularly recommended those amiable affections, and made them the distinguishing characters of a Christian; that as God, the great author of every good and perfect gift, originally designed the welfare of

of his creatures, and created them in order to be happy; so man likewise, in imitation of the Deity, after whose image he was formed, might carry on the same glorious work, extend his care and compassion to his fellow-creatures, and exercise those amiable dispositions, which the all-wise God implanted in his nature, as the fairest transcript of his own perfections. Accordingly we find, that mercy is the great duty of Christianity, laid down in almost every page of the Gospel, enjoined by the strongest motives, and enforced by the most prevailing example. And the exercise of this duty was the constant business and delight of the Author of our religion, thereby giving a more powerful sanction to his commands, and with greater force and efficacy pressing upon mankind their obligations to be merciful, from a sense that he, their Lord and Master, was the completest pattern of mercy and compassion.

It must be owned, indeed, that this virtue was not so peculiar to the Christian dispensation, as to receive its obligations solely from the example of our great Lawgiver, or from the commands with which he has enforced it. The law of mercy is a law written in their hearts, engraven by the finger of God himself, and again renewed and strengthened by the revelation to the

the Jews by Moses. It was therefore in all ages the duty of rational creatures; and every man, when he either consulted his own humanity, or attended to the voice of God, must always have found, that the miseries of mankind were a constant call to him to exercise pity and compassion; that he would not be regardless of the complaints and sorrows of others, without forgetting that he was himself a man, obliged to imitate the Father of mercies and God of all comforts.

But, how plain soever the duty was in general, the Jews, whom God, for wise reasons, had separated from the rest of mankind, proud of their privileges, and looking upon themselves as having no relation to the rest of the world, confined the exercise of this virtue within too narrow bounds, to the people of their own nation or religion; vainly imagining that the duty of loving their neighbours as themselves, as inculcated in the law and the prophets, only obliged them to relieve their own countrymen, children of the same Abraham, and that all other were as aliens and foreigners, and therefore entitled to no mercy.

The blessed Jesus, therefore, who came to unite all mankind in the bonds of mutual love and

and affection, took all opportunities of correcting this mistake, of enlarging the narrow bounds which they had set to their humanity, and of assuring them, that both Jew and Gentile were bound to consider every man as their neighbour, and the whole world as their country; that a person in distress, of whatever religion, descent, or profession, was an object of mercy; and that he, who most effectually shewed that mercy, most properly fulfilled his own duty and the will of God; and therefore lays down the general and extensive rule contained in the words of the text, as comprehending the sum and substance of the law and the prophets; that is, of the whole Jewish moral dispensation:—"Whatsoever ye "would that men should do unto you, do ye "even so to them:" that is, ever be ready to afford to others all needful aid and relief, which they, on the account of equity, humanity, and charity, desire of us; which we ourselves in like cases should reasonably expect from others.

And, indeed, this is not only the language of the Gospel, of the law and the prophets, but it is the language of nature herself, independent of any divine or human institution.

That there is in every man a fellow-feeling of the miseries of others, which will of itself call forth

forth the tenderest sentiments of our nature, and make us vigorously exert ourselves in their relief, is a truth testified both by nature and experience. We need only look into our hearts, to see the natural force of this principle of mercy. Nor indeed need we look much farther, I am afraid, to see how this natural force is abated; what pains we take to stifle its emotions, what narrow and confined bounds we set to it: how we suffer prejudices and resentments to mix in every part of our moral conduct, and in the exercise of the most godlike of all virtues, confine ourselves to the partial considerations, whether the miserable man who wants my assistance is of the same party with me, of the same vicinity, or country, or of the same religious persuasion with myself: circumstances surely too trifling and inconsiderable to be regarded, whenever misery and distress call upon me, and I find myself in a capacity to relieve them: for, whether I consider my own station and condition, the relation I stand in to my fellow-creatures, or the example of the common Father of us all, it appears plainly to be the fixed rule of duty to proportion my mercy and charity to the general wants of mankind, to exclude no man from my care and compassion, but there to bestow the largest share of it, where the objects are most

most meritorious, and where there is the strongest and most affecting distress and misery.

Reason tells us, that every degree of misery is an object of mercy; that for this very purpose this divine principle was implanted in us, that the miserable might always have an advocate in our own breast, which, from an inward feeling of the distresses of others, and that painful uneasiness naturally arising from it, might effectually dispose us to reach forth our hands to relieve their afflictions, as the readiest means of giving ease and comfort to ourselves: for there is something even in the human constitution, which spontaneously melts at the sight of human misfortune, which is moved with even the tale of fictitious woe, and therefore is still more strongly disposed to weep with them that really weep, and mourn with them that really mourn.

And to this natural feeling we may add the sense of our own condition, as another motive to universal mercy and compassion. We are born liable to the same wants and necessities, exposed in turns to the same distresses and calamities: in the complicated changes and chances of a fluctuating world, there is no kind of misery which we see and pity in others, but what may one

one time be the lot and portion of ourselves. This reflection, therefore, should awake the hearts of us all to a generous sympathy with one another, as being all united by the common ties of humanity, all heirs to the same weakness and infirmity, and, upon this account, obliged to be tenderly affected with the sufferings of others, from the frequent experience we ourselves have had what suffering is, and from the sense of our being still liable to greater. Add to this, the exercise of mercy and compassion in relieving the miseries of our fellow-creatures, is by this means really laying up so much against a day of calamity; it is treasuring up a store of goodness, which is to be paid us back, when we want it ourselves. And however unlikely that may be at present, yet when we consider the frailty of all human enjoyments, the many examples daily before our eyes of considerable fortunes in a moment sunk into dust, when it was as little expected as we can now expect it; it will become us not to build too great a dependence upon our present prosperity, but to behave in such a manner, that in a reverse of fortune we may be conscious of deserving the same generosity and compassion we had shewn to others.

Nor is this all. There is still a farther motive to a general mercy and compassion, from the re-

lation we all bear to one common Father, who formed us all of the same clay, and has made one vessel to honour and another to dishonour; thereby plainly pointing out to us the proper use of those superior blessings of power or riches, which any of us enjoy above the rest of our fel low-creatures; that our wealth should flow down in streams of beneficence to the poor and indigent, and our power be employed in protecting the helpless and miserable; and this without distinction; since we are all sons of the same Father, who hath appointed us to such several stations and conditions in life, as may best answer the wise and gracious designs of his providence.

Under this view then of the nature and extent of the duty of benevolence, I need not, I trust, use many arguments in favour of those unhappy objects, who have this day been so strongly recommended to your compassion from the throne. For surely there is nothing wanting in their situation, which can excite the sympathy of every generous and feeling heart.—Driven from their native land by a barbarous and savage proscription,—torn from every thing that was dear and valuable in life,—they have been compelled to throw themselves under the protection of the well-known generosity of Britons, and to seek an asylum in this land of genuine liberty and

and legal security. And to the honour of this land be it spoken, they have not been disappointed in the well-grounded expectations they had formed. The public liberality has been in a wonderful manner extended to them, and at the same time has been conducted with so much caution and prudence, as to alleviate their distresses, for a much longer time than, considering the greatness of their number, could well have been supposed. But the contributions, which have hitherto been chiefly confined to the metropolis, now beginning to fail, our gracious Sovereign hath thought it expedient to extend the scale of liberality, and to call upon all his subjects to lend a helping hand to forward this labour of love. Suffer me therefore to second his benevolent intention, by recommending to your compassion this great and venerable body of men. It is true, they are aliens to us by birth, they differ from us in religious opinions, they are sprung from a nation, from which we have ever experienced the greatest perfidy and most determined hostility. But the mercy of the Gospel overleaps all these partial distinctions, and, regarding the necessities and not the opinions of men, commands us to do good unto all men. And indeed, however these unhappy persons may on this ground of Christian charity justly claim our assistance, yet they have other cir-

cumstances also, which plead strongly in their favour. They are all of them men of liberal education; they have all of them devoted their lives to the service of God, under the strict and rigorous rules of discipline and austerity, in which the church of Rome enjoins to all her ecclesiastical members. They are many of them venerable for their age, and most of them for the integrity and sanctity of their morals. They have been reduced from a state of competency, and some of them from a state of affluence, to seek their bread in a strange land, and much the greater part of them even without a tongue to make their wants known to the ear of the compassionate. And this they suffer not from any crime or default of their own, but from the tyranny of the worst and basest faction that ever disgraced the human character. They suffer it, because they refused to take oaths, which were directly contrary to their consciences, and to the principles they had ever maintained. They suffer it, because they refused to acknowledge the authority of a faction, which had established itself by a complication of nefarious and unheard of villanies; a faction, which had plundered the temples of God, had trampled religion under foot, had set up the standard of open infidelity, had bid defiance to every principle of order, law, and justice; a faction, which treated the

whole of the royal family with an insolence and wantonness of cruelty in history unparalleled, and finally embrued their hands in the blood of one of the best monarchs that ever ascended the Gallic throne.

Surely then these unhappy men, who, from an unshaken regard to principles of loyalty and religion, sacrificed every thing that was dear to them, and preferred nakedness and poverty to a servile compliance with the dishonourable terms required of them by a detestable faction, deserve every mark of regard from those, who have any love for their religion or their country.

I need not, therefore, plead for them. Your own generous hearts will make their case your own, and induce you to do to them, what, in similar circumstances, you would wish that men should do unto you. And should it please divine Providence ever to suffer these unhappy men to return to their native country, sure I am that they will return to it with hearts overflowing with gratitude, and with the most exalted ideas of British generosity; and I will farther add, that the kindness which they have here experienced will contribute more to remove their prejudices against the religion we profess, than the strongest arguments which have ever been produced

produced by the best advocates for the protestant cause: for it must strike the hearts of every one of them with a resistless force, that that religion can never be a bad one, which produces so liberally the genuine fruits of disinterested love and unlimited compassion to the distressed members of a church, which, for ages past, has been denouncing anathemas against us, as a race of heretics not within the pale of salvation, and fit only to be extirpated from off the face of the earth.

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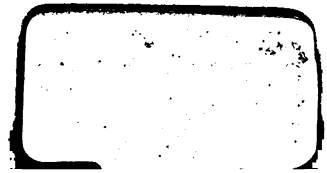
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